

2019 Legislative Highlights
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Maryland House of Delegates

The Maryland General Assembly passed a total of 864 bills between the House and the Senate this session. Below is a highlight of these bills and the budget.

Education Matters

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (HB1413/SB1030). One of the most anticipated legislative priorities was related to the Kirwan Commission and education reform that aims to transform the State's early childhood, primary and secondary education into a world-class system. It is based on the recommendations of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education led by former University System of Maryland Chancellor Dr. Brit Kirwan. This Blue Print bill provides \$255 million in FY2020 for expanding full-day pre-kindergarten, early intervention for struggling learners, and enhancing special education, and establishes the Office of Maryland Inspector General for Education for greater accountability.

School Calendar Choice (HB 437). In 2016, Governor Hogan signed an executive order requiring every county to begin its school year after Labor Day. While as a parent, I like the idea of beginning school years after a major holiday, as a policymaker I also understand the importance of giving our diverse school districts the flexibility to decide what works best for their students and teachers. This bill returns local control back to each school district without mandating any specific starting dates.

Safe Schools Maryland (SB 165). This bill establishes an anonymous tip line, within the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS). The program will establish procedures for anonymous reporting of behaviors of concern and other dangerous, violent, or unlawful activities, or the threat of these activities, involving one or more students. Participation in the program is voluntary for local school systems, public schools, and nonpublic schools.

Working Family Matters

Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act (HB 336). In light of the federal shutdown that affected many Marylanders, the Economic Matters Committee helped advance an emergency bill (HB 336) to provide those affected Maryland federal workers financial relief through an unemployment insurance fund.

Fight for Fifteen (HB 166). One of the most watched and thoroughly debated topics of the 2019 session, which gradually increases the state minimum wage to \$15/hour by January 1, 2025 for employers with at least 15 employees (small employers have until July 2026 to reach that). This is a sensible bill that will help over 573,000 working Marylanders while taking into consideration the regional economic landscape, small businesses and nonprofits.

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (HB 810). This bill increases the maximum income limits for eligibility for a credit against state income tax for childcare expenses to \$92,000 for an

individual or \$143,000 for a married couple filing jointly. The bill also makes the credit refundable, and every year eligibility thresholds increase as a cost-of-living adjustment.

Tax Sale Protections (HB 1209). Tax sales disproportionately harm low-income people, senior citizens, and people of color. Tax sale foreclosures displace the elderly, contribute to vacancy and abandonment, and destabilize communities. Some tax sale investors have taken advantage of vulnerable people by charging excessive fees. Many homeowners in tax sale do not understand what is happening and don't know where to go for help.

Business Matters

Clean Energy Jobs Act (HB1158/SB516). Thanks to the leadership of environmental advocates and our D15 Senator Brian Feldman, we were able to finally pass the Clean Energy Jobs Act on Sine Die. I was proud to have voted for it twice in the Economic Matters Committee and again on the House floor. It would require Maryland to have 50% of our power supply from clean energy sources (wind and solar) by 2030, doubling the current mandate of 25% by 2020. This is a win-win for the environment and for Maryland's economy as we transition away from fossil fuel and capitalize on the fast-growing clean energy industries and jobs.

Small business Credit Card Agreements (HB 777). An important function of the Economic Matters Committee is to ensure fair play in the marketplace. HB 777 prohibits a credit card company from charging excessive fees if a business cancels a processing agreement and requires credit card companies to explicitly outline their fee structure in their agreements to protect small businesses from deceptive and confusing practices by big credit card companies.

Extending tax credits for job creators (HB 173). The Job Creation Tax Credit provides a tax credit to businesses that wish to expand or establish operations in Maryland and create jobs. For over 14 years, this tax credit has created nearly 18,000 jobs in Maryland. To continue this growth, we extended the tax credits sunset from January 1st of 2020 to January 1st of 2022.

Extending R&D tax credit (HB175). The R&D tax credit program is under evaluation as the Department of Legislative Services report found that it has heavily skewed toward large companies that benefit from this program. We voted for a one-year extension of the program to June 2022 while evaluating its effectiveness and equity in distribution between large and small firms.

My bill, **HB 1161 and its Senate cross-file SB 574, Maryland Small Business Innovation Research and Technology Transfer Incentive Program**, passed the House unanimously on Sine Die and will be headed to the Governor's desk. It was intended to authorize the creation of a state grant program to match a portion of grants received by companies from the federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. Even though it was recommended by the Department of Legislative Services as a better alternative to the current R&T tax credit program, and adopted in over a dozen states, the bill was amended to require the Department of Commerce to submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly by the end of this year—a first-step. While I wish we would move faster on such economic competitiveness measures, I understand the virtue of patience in moving any bill of substance, especially when there is a fiscal note.

Public Health Matters

Prescription Drug Affordability Board (HB 768). To address the rising prescription drug costs, we passed HB 768, which would make Maryland the first state in the nation to establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board with the authority to set an upper price limit on drugs purchased by health plans that serve state and county government employees.

Maryland Easy Enrollment Health Insurance Program (HB814). This bill would allow those without health insurance to check a box on their state tax returns to indicate whether they want state officials to determine their eligibility for enrollment for Medicaid or subsidized healthcare under the Affordable Care Act.

Tobacco 21 (HB 1169). This year, we joined 26 other states, including Virginia, in raising tobacco purchasing age from 18 to 21. The bill was voted out of the Economic Matters Committee and passed both chambers.

Election Matters

I co-sponsored multiple election bills this year and introduced one with Senator Cheryl Kagan on ballot access because my own campaign taught me the need to make our election system more friendly to more communities. We passed several bills this session to implement the same-day voter registration that was approved by voters in November, provide pre-paid postage for absentee ballots, change absentee voting to vote-by-mail to avoid confusion among voters, and require local boards of elections to do annual voter registration drives in high schools.

I introduced **HB 530, Ballot Access--Affiliation with a Party**, to make party registration deadline the same as voter registration deadline to allow independents to re-register for a party and vote on the same day, just as newly registered voters. Currently, there is an arbitrary party affiliation deadline three weeks before the election date. This bill would encourage unaffiliated voters, who are disproportionately immigrants and young voters, to participate in our closed primary system, which in many districts, is the de facto election. But change is hard for both parties. Some worry that people may show up last-minute to game the system, but with same-day registration being implemented, we will face last-minute voter registration and party affiliation anyway. In spite of the national move toward same-day registration and the official endorsements of our bill by the Maryland Democratic Party, the League of Women Voters, Get Money Out Maryland, Common Cause Maryland, and CASA de Maryland, and leaders of the immigrant communities, the bill did not receive a vote in the Ways & Means Committee this year. I hope to reintroduce next year and continue this dialogue of inclusion and equity in voting.

Environment Matters

Besides the Clean Energy Jobs Act, which I mentioned before, we also passed several bills to combat climate change and protect the Chesapeake.

Reducing greenhouse gas emission. The number one source of greenhouse gas emissions in the state of Maryland is due to vehicle emission. As of 2014, over 86% of these transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions came from traditional gasoline or diesel powered on-road vehicles. The **Regional Transportation and Climate Protection Act of 2019** (HB 277)

authorizes the Governor to include our state in regional government initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector and to impose a fee on the sale or distribution of motor fuel. **The Clean Cars Act of 2019** (HB 1246), sponsored by my District 15 colleague Del. Fraser-Hidalgo, increases the total tax credit allowances for those purchasing electric vehicles from \$3 million to \$6 million. This will incentivize drivers to buy more environmentally friendly vehicles and decrease the carbon impact on our environment.

Maryland will become the first state to ban Styrofoam with HB 109, following the examples of Montgomery, Prince George's and Ann Arundel counties.

Transportation Matters

The state budget for FY 2020 includes \$14.7 million for transportation funding for projects in Montgomery County, a 13% increase from the FY 2019 budget.

This year, Governor Hogan is actively advancing the largest public-private partnership project in the country to expand I-270 and I-495 for HOV lanes. While the legislature wants to work with the Governor to find the best traffic relief solutions, we want to make sure any highway projects are part of a multimodal solution that includes investing in planned transit infrastructure and other less costly options including reversible lanes. The Montgomery County delegation is in active dialogues with the Governor's office and the Maryland Department of Transportation and we are following the proposed P3 project closely.

The Bikeways Network Program is designed to help fill the gaps in our current bicycle transit system and increase connectivity. The original funding for this program was \$7.1 million over the next 5 years. **HB 1281** guarantees that this program received \$3.8 million annually from the Transportation Trust Fund, thus increasing the 5-year funding to at least \$19 million. This will ensure our bikeways are high quality and well-connected.

Gun Safety Matters

Maryland has been on the forefront of ensuring gun safety and we are fortunate to have strong advocates in Moms Demand Action to push for several pieces of legislation this year. One important bill, **HB 786**, extends background checks for the sale and transfer of rifles and shotguns via secondary transactions and **HB 740** prohibits the manufacturing, buying, selling or owning a firearm manufactured that is not imprinted with a serial number, including 3D printed guns and "ghost" guns whose parts can be purchased and assembled.

We also passed **HB 1343** to disband the Handgun Review Board, overseen by the Governor's political appointees who have issued carry permits at a record rate, and instead, send appeals of rejected or concealed carry permits to the Office of Administrative Hearings for better oversight.

Budget Matters

Despite a General Fund shortfall of \$269 million, partially due to the Federal Government shutdown, the Appropriations Committee was able to reorganize the state budget to fund our priorities without raising any taxes. The legislature approved a record \$7 billion investment in education, which includes \$500 million school construction funding. We also approved \$11.3 billion for the state's Medicaid program, and \$80 million of additional funding to fight the opioid crisis.

Montgomery County's share of the state budget increased by 8.8% from FY 2019, including an additional \$52.9 million for education and \$1.7 million increase for transportation over last year. In all, **the County received a total of \$179 million in capital projects, excluding transportation projects.** These include \$6.57 million for Montgomery College facilities (including a new Science and Technology building), \$4.9 million for Potomac Elementary School and \$11 million for Seneca Valley High School in Germantown, and \$1 million for the City of Gaithersburg police station.

The District 15 legislative team sponsored bond bills with a total of \$1.52 million in capital investments for community facilities including the BlackRock Center for the Arts, the Black Hill SEED Classroom, the Ivymount School, and the Poolesville Wine Crushing Facility.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Del. Lily Qi