



## 2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION CONCLUDES

Dear Friend,

The 2017 Session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded at midnight on April 10th and the following is a summary of several important topics and initiatives that may interest you. Thank you for taking the time to read this email and if you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at [brian.feldman@senate.state.md.us](mailto:brian.feldman@senate.state.md.us).

### **A Balanced Budget**

Following Governor Hogan's introduction of his proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Budget in January, discussions in the Legislature during the 90 day Session focused on preserving crucial funding for priority areas such as education and economic development. The \$43.5 billion balanced Budget was fully vetted and approved by the General Assembly without significant controversy. In a display of bipartisanship, the FY 2018 Budget passed the Senate unanimously and by a 123-13 vote in the House of Delegates. With the approval of this Budget, we were able to fund our priorities without imposing any new taxes. The General Fund will have a fund balance in excess of \$100 million and the Rainy Day fund will contain \$860 million. Additionally, through prudent cuts, the structural deficit was significantly reduced from \$400 million to \$38 million.

One of Maryland's greatest achievements is its public education system. I am proud of Maryland's designation from *Education Week*, the Nation's leading education newspaper, which ranks Maryland's public schools **5th** in the Nation. This distinction is a direct consequence of the noteworthy investment the State has made in K-12 education over the last decade. The total support for K-12 public school education in the FY 2018 Budget is \$6.4 billion, the largest commitment in State history. The State continues to invest in higher education and this Budget allows for undergraduate tuition increases at our public institutions to be capped at 2%. Furthermore, funding for community colleges increases by \$2.5 million for FY 2018. Together, these investments have made higher education in Maryland more affordable and accessible.

As the original author and lead sponsor of the innovative Biotechnology Tax Credit program, I am pleased to report that this program has been extremely successful over the past decade in incentivizing private investment in small, early stage biotech companies in Maryland. This year, \$12 million has been reallocated to the program.

The FY 2018 Budget increases funding to local governments and Montgomery County is slated to receive more than \$780 million in direct aid, a 3.6% increase over FY 2017. Additionally, Montgomery County has been allocated more than \$55.7 million for public school construction,

\$200,000 for public libraries and \$103 million for higher education facilities - \$88 million of that is earmarked for The Universities at Shady Grove for the construction of a new biomedical sciences building on the Rockville campus, located in District 15.

Maryland has retained its coveted AAA bond rating, one of only **eleven** states in the Nation to receive the rating from all three rating agencies - S&P Global Ratings (formerly Standard and Poor's), Moody's Investors and Fitch Ratings. The AAA bond rating is essential for keeping our State's borrowing costs low, which allows the State to finance a wide range of critical capital improvements.

## **Maryland's Economy**

Maryland's economy continues to make positive strides. The latest jobs data was released at the end of February and the unemployment rate has fallen over the past year, down to 4.2%, below the national average of 4.7%. The State has seen big gains in overall job creation. In February, Maryland experienced the strongest three-month job creation surge since the Great Recession, adding 11,500 jobs, with a total of 57,800 jobs created since February, 2016.

## **Significant 2017 Bills**

Below are a few notable bills which gained passage that I supported, several of which were assigned to the Senate Finance Committee on which I serve.

The **Maryland Healthy Working Family Act** requires businesses in Maryland that employ 15 or more workers to provide them at least five earned sick days per year. The bill mandates earned sick leave for over 700,000 workers who are currently without it. The employees must work at least 12 hours a week and spend at least 106 days per year on a business' payroll. As a **co-sponsor** of this legislation, I believe this will provide much needed relief for individuals who become ill and cannot or should not go to work. It should be noted that Montgomery County passed similar, more expansive, legislation in October, 2016 and this new statewide law does not impact or preempt the Montgomery County law already in place.

In an effort to address skyrocketing increases in vital prescription drugs, I **co-sponsored** the **Essential Off-Patent or Generic Drugs - Price Gouging - Prohibition** bill, which authorizes Maryland's Attorney General with the power to sue drug manufacturers who engage in price gouging practices - raising prices on essential drugs to "unconscionable" levels without justification. A few examples of drastic price hikes that shocked me were the 553% increase over a three year period for Naloxone, a critical drug for treating opioid addiction, the 8,281% increase over a six month period for the antibiotic Doxycycline and the 5,000% overnight increase in Daraprim, a drug used to treat infectious diseases that jumped from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill. "Unconscionable" price increases such as these burden our overall health care system and are dangerous to the health and financial security of Marylanders in need of these lifesaving drugs. The bill was assigned to the Senate Finance Committee's Health Subcommittee, which I chair, and we worked diligently to pass this legislation with strong bi-partisan support. I am proud to say that Maryland is the first state in the Nation to enact such legislation.

I also **co-sponsored** the **Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act of 2017**, which introduces a host of important prevention and treatment measures to address the heroin and opioid epidemic affecting Marylanders and our entire Nation. The legislation increases funding for drug courts and establishes new crisis treatment centers, a health crisis hotline and an overdose response program, as well as many other potentially lifesaving efforts. In addition, the legislation includes the "Keep the Door Open Act" to ensure that treatment providers in communities are

properly compensated for their work. This legislation is broadly viewed as the most comprehensive state legislative package in the Nation in combatting the opioid addiction crisis.

On the environmental front, Maryland has become the third state in the Country to prohibit hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking. I **co-sponsored** the Senate version of the **Oil and Natural Gas - Hydraulic Fracturing - Prohibition** bill and Governor Hogan has already signed it.

Several bills passed the legislature as a direct result of actions taken by the Trump Administration and Congress. For example, I **co-sponsored The Maryland Defense Act** which provides funding for the Attorney General to hire additional lawyers to engage in lawsuits that may need to be brought against the Federal government because of policies or budgetary issues that could adversely affect Marylanders. These Federal actions include such things as the proposed defunding of the \$73 million Chesapeake Bay Program or full repeal of the Affordable Care Act, which could potentially result in 500,000 Marylanders losing their health insurance and could cost Maryland several billion dollars. Also, I **co-sponsored the Family Planning Services - Continuity of Care** bill that will mitigate cuts to Planned Parenthood of Maryland by reimbursing them for services if Congress cuts their funding.

### **New Subcommittee Chairmanship and Feldman Legislation**

This Session, I was appointed to Chair the Senate Finance Committee's Health Subcommittee which has jurisdiction over a broad range of healthcare policy and health insurance issues. Given the current debate at the Federal level regarding the Affordable Care Act, there are few, if any, more important issues than the uncertain future of our Nation's healthcare system. Any change at the Federal level could have severe financial implications for Maryland and I look forward to the challenges presented by this new leadership role.

Below are some of the bills that I sponsored this Session which gained passage.

As a board member of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and your State Senator, I led the fight in the Senate to gain approval for emergency legislation to establish **The Washington Metrorail Safety Commission**. In collaboration with Virginia and Washington, D.C., this Commission will provide critically needed safety and regulatory oversight, along with reliability standards, for our Metro system. Governor Hogan signed the bill into law and the \$4.8 million in Federal funding that had been withheld until passage of this legislation can now be released.

The topic of long-term care insurance is both timely and significant because 1.5 million "baby boomers" currently reside in Maryland and many of them will require long-term care. This bill establishes a **Task Force on Long-Term Care Education and Planning** to examine the subject thoroughly and to report their findings and recommendations to the General Assembly in December, 2017. The objective of the bill is that every Maryland resident who reaches the age of 50 will receive the information they need to plan for their future long-term care needs.

One in seven women will experience depression during pregnancy or in the first 12 months after childbirth. More than 400,000 infants are born every year to mothers who are depressed, making perinatal depression the most underdiagnosed and untreated obstetric complication in the United States. In 2015, I sponsored a bill to establish a task force to study maternal mental health and in December of 2016, the Task Force submitted their recommendations to the General Assembly. Based on their report, I sponsored legislation this year that takes the first step toward creating a **comprehensive maternal mental health system of care** in Maryland. The bill requires the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to develop accredited continuing medical education

programs for providers to improve early identification of postpartum depression and assists providers in addressing the emotional and mental health needs of pregnant and postpartum patients.

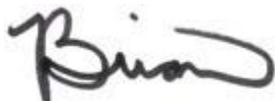
Finally, I also introduced and gained passage of several bills that update, clarify and modernize Maryland's transportation, insurance and banking laws and two bills that simplify and streamline Maryland's corporate laws.

### **Capital Projects**

In collaboration with my District 15 colleagues, Delegates Kathleen Dumais, David Fraser-Hidalgo and Aruna Miller, I worked to secure capital funding for five worthy projects in our area. Two preservation projects, **Boys Negro School** and **Pleasant View Historic Association's Quince Orchard School**, will access State funds to preserve and stabilize these significant African American historic structures. Two additional projects will support individuals with disabilities. **Madison Fields Therapeutic Equestrian Center** provides equine assisted therapy for those who have physical or cognitive disabilities, as well as those who struggle with anxiety, PTSD or ADHD. **Potomac Community Resources Home** provides on-site living for individuals with developmental differences. Lastly, the District 15 team was successful in obtaining **\$1 million in funding** for a **custom wine crush and teaching facility** in Poolesville. In partnership with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority, entrepreneurs interested in the wine industry will be able to lease small parcels of land to start their business. And, in conjunction with the University of Maryland and the Universities at Shady Grove, the facility will support educational opportunities to study viticulture and enology science, hospitality, marketing and culinary arts - creating opportunities for students across the State.

In closing, I want to thank you for contacting me during this Session with your thoughts and comments. I value your input and if you have any questions or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us](mailto:Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us) or call my office at [301-858-3169](tel:301-858-3169).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.