



2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS

Dear Friend,

January 9th marked the opening day of the 2019 Legislative Session and I am proud to return to Annapolis to represent you in the Maryland State Senate.

New challenges present themselves as I assume the role of **Vice Chair of the Senate Finance Committee**. The Committee has jurisdiction over a wide array of subject matter, including bills seeking to expand access to affordable healthcare, stabilizing the cost of health insurance premiums, addressing escalating prescription drug prices and implementing effective policies and programs to aid those who are grappling with debilitating and life-threatening opioid addiction. The Committee will also take up environmental legislation as scientists worldwide urge policy makers to take action on climate change. Additionally, the Committee will hear legislation proposing to raise the minimum wage statewide. I am expecting both a demanding and exciting Session in the Finance Committee and look forward to shaping the discussion on these and many other topics that come before my Committee.

Please take a moment to review the highlights below and, as always, do not hesitate to contact me with your questions, comments or concerns at Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us.

Governor Hogan's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

Last week, Governor Hogan proposed his Budget for Fiscal Year 2020. The \$ 46.6 billion Budget represents a \$ 1.8 billion increase (4%) over the Fiscal Year 2019 spending plan while leaving a closing balance of \$ 805.4 million for Fiscal Year 2019 and \$ 105.5 million for Fiscal Year 2020. Additionally, the Rainy Day Fund balance will be \$ 1.2 billion and combined cash balances at the close of Fiscal 2020 will be \$ 1.3 billion.

In crafting this year's Budget, we need to be mindful of the testimony recently received in the Legislature from economists predicting a slowdown in our State economy by 2020 and revenue write downs may occur as a result. Continuing to manage our finances wisely is critical if we hope to retain our coveted AAA bond rating, one of only 11 states in the Nation to receive the rating from all three rating agencies.

Federal Government Shutdown

I am sure I am not alone when I say how distressed I am by the recent Federal government shutdown - the longest in history and one which impacted our region more than any in the Nation. An estimated 230,000 Marylanders hold Federal jobs and an estimated 90,000 were either furloughed or had to work without pay. Another 163,000 Maryland residents are Federal contractors and about half of them were not paid during the shutdown. As a result of the short-term deal that was announced on Friday, Federal workers will receive their pay retroactively. However, the wage loss in the private sector is estimated to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars - severely impacting hard working Marylanders and negatively impacting our State economy. Unfortunately, Friday's announcement only runs through February 15th and we could easily find ourselves back in shutdown mode.

An anomaly in the unemployment insurance laws exposed by the shutdown is the fact that Federal workers who were furloughed and did not go to work were eligible to file for unemployment benefits. However, workers who were forced to go to work without pay were deemed **not eligible**. In an effort to correct this inequity and support Federal workers if the Federal government shuts down again, I am introducing **The Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act** to allow Federal workers who are forced to work without pay during a shutdown to apply for unemployment benefits. The Washington Post reported on this today and you can read the full article [here](#). Several other states are moving forward with similar action, including Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Healthcare

As Senate Chair of the bipartisan **Maryland Health Insurance Coverage Protection Commission**, I have been very involved in working to find new and innovative ways to protect and expand health insurance coverage. With the dismantling of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) at the Federal level and the uncertainty associated with litigation over the constitutionality of the ACA, many Marylanders are concerned about the future of healthcare in Maryland and the possibility of losing some of the protections embodied in the ACA.

I am sponsoring legislation, **Protect Maryland Health Care Act of 2019**, that seeks to incentivize Marylanders, particularly young healthy people, to purchase health insurance and stay in the insurance pool, thus lessening cost spikes for all Marylanders. Six years ago, over 12% of our residents were without health insurance. Currently the number is closer to 6%. As more Marylanders have health insurance, uncompensated care costs decline and this helps to drive down premiums.

A separate bill that I am introducing this Session will take many of the ACA protections that are now in jeopardy and safeguard them in Maryland, including protections for pre-existing conditions.

Prescription Drugs

Nearly 70% of all Americans are currently taking a prescription drug and, for many, access to these medications controls their ability to live a normal life. However, these drugs have become increasingly less affordable and therefore less attainable. Many healthcare providers have opted to exclude the cost of prescription drugs in their coverage plans leaving millions of Americans without access to medications they desperately need.

The Finance Committee will be considering a variety of bills addressing prescription drug affordability and I will keep you apprised of progress on this critical topic.

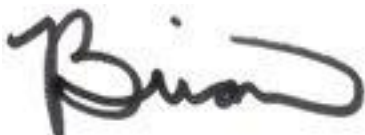
Clean Energy Jobs Act

Given the recent Federal and international climate reports, it is essential that Maryland join other states to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy while also making significant investments in creating jobs in our emerging Clean Energy Sector.

This Session, I am partnering with environmental advocates and clean energy businesses to sponsor **The Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act of 2019**. The bill will expand our State's goals for securing electricity from renewable sources to 50% by 2030 (current law is 25% by 2020) thus reducing our fossil fuel emissions and putting us on the path to 100% renewable energy by 2040. The new law will also add 20,000 new Maryland jobs in the solar industry and 5,500 wind industry jobs by 2030. In addition, the bill will require substantial investments in clean energy job training programs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the two fastest growing jobs in the United States are solar installers and jobs which service wind turbines.

These are just a few of the topics that I am working on in Annapolis this Session. As always, I value your input so if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us or call the office at 301-858-3169.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.