



2016 Legislative Session Concludes

Dear Friend,

The 2016 Session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded at midnight on April 11th 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.

A Balanced Budget

From Governor Hogan's introduction of his proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 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 balanced \$ 42.3 billion Budget was fully vetted and approved by the General Assembly without significant controversy. In a display of bipartisanship, the FY 2017 Budget passed unanimously in the Senate and by a large majority in the House of Delegates. With the approval of this Budget, we were able to fund our priorities without imposing new taxes. The State's Rainy Day Fund contains over \$ 1 billion and the statutorily State required pension obligations are fully met.

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 **4th** in the Nation. This distinction is a direct result of the significant 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 2017 budget is \$ 6.3 billion, the largest commitment in State history. Higher education will receive \$ 1.9 billion for our public colleges and universities - an increase of over \$ 106.5 million, with tuition increases for our public institutions to be capped this year at 2%. Additionally, funding for community colleges increased by 5.4%. Together, these investments have made higher education in Maryland more affordable and accessible. On a related note, Maryland's Capital Budget for FY 2017 includes a \$ 12 million increase in funding over last year for Montgomery County schools as part of a supplemental grant program for high growth-rate school districts in the State.

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 for FY 2017. Some modifications were made this Session to allow additional investors to take advantage of this initiative, reflecting Maryland's long-term commitment to growing the State's biotechnology sector.

The FY 2017 Budget increases funding to local governments and Montgomery County is slated to receive more than \$ 759 million in direct aid, a 5% increase from FY 2016. Additionally, Montgomery County has been allocated more than \$ 43 million for public school construction, \$ 1.5 million for public libraries and \$ 54 million for higher education facilities - \$ 36.7 million of that is slated for The Universities at Shady Grove to begin construction of a new biomedical sciences building on the Rockville campus, located in District 15.

Maryland has also retained its AAA bond rating, one of only **ten** states in the Nation to receive such a rating from all three rating agencies - Standard and Poor's, Moody's Investors and Fitch Ratings. Standard and Poor's has rated the Maryland bonds AAA since 1961. Moody's has assigned Maryland bonds the AAA rating since 1973 and

Fitch since 1993. The AAA bond rating is essential to 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 unemployment rate has fallen over the past year, down to 4.7% as of the end of February, 2016. Additionally, more than 37,600 new jobs were created over the last year. The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation notes that "**our private sector remains strong**" with significant growth in the manufacturing sector.

Significant 2016 Bills

Below are a few noteworthy bills which gained passage this year that I supported:

The College Affordability Act of 2016 establishes matching State funds for eligible college savings accounts and creates a refundable tax credit of up to \$ 5,000 for student loan debt. This important legislation creates incentives for lower income families to invest in college savings accounts.

Drunk Driving Reduction Act of 2016 (Noah's Law) broadly expands the use of ignition interlock devices for individuals convicted of impaired driving at or above the State's legal blood alcohol limit. As a **co-sponsor** of this bill which is named in memory of Officer Noah Leotta, a Montgomery County police officer who was killed by a drunk driver, I am pleased that it passed unanimously in both the House and the Senate.

In an effort to improve retirement security for private-sector employees who have no access to employer sponsored retirement savings accounts, I **co-sponsored** the **Maryland Small Business Retirement Savings Program and Trust** bill. This legislation creates a framework for employers who do not have their own retirement savings program to establish a payroll deposit account that allows their employees to participate in a newly-created State retirement savings program. All the funds in these accounts will come from employee payroll deductions and the employee will retain complete control over investment decisions. Maryland is one of a handful of states to pass such a law which provides substantial opportunities for workers to save for retirement. It is estimated that this will help one million Marylanders in the private sector save for retirement, without imposing costs or compliance burdens on small businesses.

The Justice Reinvestment Act aims to reduce recidivism rates by focusing jail-time on violent offenders, streamlining the parole process for select individuals and helping those convicted of non-violent drug offenses to access treatment to end drug addiction. Because of this legislation, the State is projected to save millions of dollars as a result of decreased spending on incarceration. This bill, which received bipartisan support, incorporates the best of both worlds when it comes to criminal justice reform; a reduction in the enormous cost associated with incarceration and a focus on ending the insidious cycle of repeat offenders.

Feldman Legislation

Below are several of the bills that I successfully sponsored and will be signed into law:

In light of a tragedy that resulted in the death of two Montgomery County teenagers, I was determined to address the weakness in our laws for adults who host underage drinking parties in their homes. I introduced **Alex and Calvin's Law**, with Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo, which increases the potential penalties for adults who host underage drinking parties. My hope is that these expanded penalties will serve as a powerful deterrent. The bill received strong bipartisan support in both chambers.

I remain committed to advocate for the disability community and I am proud to have sponsored the **Achieving A Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act** which was **signed into law today** by Governor Hogan. The ABLE Act allows individuals with disabilities and their relatives to set up and fund tax-deferred accounts, similar to a 529 College Savings Plan account, without negatively impacting eligibility for Social Security and Medicaid. Family members contributing to these accounts may also deduct their contributions on their Maryland income tax return. Funds from the accounts may be used for education expenses, transportation, medical expenses and employment

training. This is **one of the most significant pieces of legislation for the disability community** over the past several years as it is estimated that more than 50,000 Marylanders will be eligible to open ABLE accounts.

To ensure that elected officials who are found guilty of a felony do not continue to receive taxpayer-funded State pension benefits, I sponsored the **Forfeiture of Benefits** bill. Currently, active and retired members of the General Assembly must forfeit their pension benefits if they are convicted of a felony or misdemeanor related to their public duties. This bill adds our six constitutional officers: the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, Treasurer and Secretary of State and makes them ineligible to receive pension benefits if they are found guilty of a felony that is related to their official duties or responsibilities. Surprisingly, until now, Maryland had no such laws on the books.

As one of two primary sponsors for the **Clean Energy Jobs - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards Revisions** bill, I worked with environmental advocates and clean energy sector businesses to gain passage of this legislation which increases the amount of clean renewable energy sources used in Maryland. The bill was a **top priority for the environmental community** as it requires Maryland to generate 25% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020 and facilitates the creation of thousands of new green jobs for the State's growing Clean Energy Sector. There are currently 170 solar businesses in Maryland, employing more than 4,300 people. Job growth in the solar industry increased an impressive 60% over the past two years and these jobs diversify our State's economic portfolio and help us reach our clean energy goals. On the environmental side, Maryland's Climate Action Plan cites the increase in the use of renewable energy as the **single greatest step Maryland can take to reduce climate-disrupting emissions**.

On a related note, I sponsored and gained passage of two Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) bills. The **Clean Energy Loan Program** bill removes the electric generating capacity limit for commercial property owners who receive loans to fund energy efficiency projects. This will allow small businesses to finance larger scale renewable energy projects. Additionally, the **Residential Clean Energy Loan Program** bill requires the Maryland Clean Energy Center to conduct a study to determine optimal design and implementation strategies for a residential clean energy program for the State and report their findings to the General Assembly by October 1st.

Capital Projects

In collaboration with the District 15 Delegates - Kathleen Dumais, David Fraser-Hidalgo and Aruna Miller - I worked to secure funding for the final two grass sports fields at the **Maryland SoccerPlex**. The Maryland SoccerPlex is a state-of-the-art multi-sport facility that currently has 22 full-sized fields and hosts more than 8,000 soccer and lacrosse tournaments a year. As well as providing a place where thousands of young athletes participate in healthy physical activity, the Maryland SoccerPlex fosters the valuable lessons of leadership, team work and perseverance.

The District 15 Team also obtained funding for the installation of a new bridge and streambank stabilization along the **Western Piedmont Trail** in Little Bennett Regional Park. The monies will be used to improve the trail's natural habitat and make it accessible for visitors from across the County and State.

Early Voting

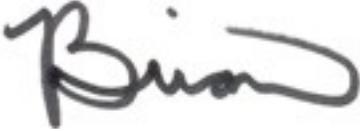
Finally, I want to remind you that **Early Voting** begins **Thursday, April 14th and continues through April 21st from 10 AM to 8 PM** at the ten Early Voting locations listed below:

- Germantown Recreation Center, 18905 Kingsview Road, Germantown 20874
- Marilyn J. Praisner Community Recreation Center, 14906 Old Columbia Pike, Burtonsville 20866
- Montgomery County Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville 20850
- Silver Spring Civic Building at Veterans Plaza, One Veterans Place, Silver Spring 20910
- Activity Center at Bohrer Park, 506 S. Frederick Avenue, Gaithersburg 20877
- Damascus Community Recreation Center, 25520 Oak Drive, Damascus 20872
- Jane E. Lawton Community Recreation Center, 4301 Willow Lane, Chevy Chase 20815
- Mid-County Community Recreation Center, 2004 Queensguard Road, Silver Spring 20906
- Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad, 2400 Arcola Avenue, Wheaton 20902
- Potomac Community Recreation Center, 11315 Falls Road, Potomac 20854

Regular Primary Voting Day is **April 26th from 7 AM to 8 PM**. If you wish to check your voting location, you can access that information by visiting the Maryland State Board of Elections: voterservices.elections.maryland.gov/PollingPlaceSearch

In closing, I want to thank you again 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 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 that reads "Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

By Authority: Citizens for Brian Feldman, Elaine Garson, Treasurer