



Dear Friend,

For the first time since the battle over secession in 1861 and for only the second time in our State's 440-year history, the Maryland General Assembly adjourned early. In an effort to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus and lead by example, the 2020 Session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded on March 18 – nineteen days prior to the scheduled April 6 date for Sine Die.

Last week was historic, and I can best describe it to you in terms of a team pulling together to cross the finish line with heightened urgency and a shared common goal. We fulfilled our primary Constitutional duty of passing a balanced budget and then turned our attention to the most pressing bills of the Session, including passing emergency legislation to protect the citizens of Maryland as we face the realities of COVID-19.

Please take a moment to read this letter. If you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### **The Budget**

Beginning with the introduction of Governor Hogan's proposed **Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget** in January, discussions in the legislature focused on preserving crucial funding for priority areas, especially the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (the Kirwan Commission). The \$47.9 billion balanced Budget was fully vetted and unanimously approved by the Senate in a display of bipartisanship. We were able to fund \$7.2 billion for public education, including \$362 million to support the initial implementation of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations. Additionally, \$100 million in reserves has been allotted to Governor Hogan to use toward responding to COVID-19. Also, the General Assembly was able to restore \$39.5 million for the proposed rate increase of 4% for community service providers in the Developmental Disabilities Administration, behavioral health providers and Medicaid service providers.

Maryland has also retained its coveted AAA bond rating, one of only **thirteen** states in the nation to receive such a rating from all three rating agencies – S&P Global Ratings (formerly Standard and Poor's), Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings. Maryland holds the longest continuous AAA bond rating for any state in the country. 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.

### **Education**

Looking toward the future of education in Maryland, in 2016 the Maryland General Assembly established the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (called the Kirwan Commission) and tasked them to review and recommend changes to education funding formulas and to make policy recommendations that would enable Maryland's pre K-12 system to reach the level of the best-performing systems in the world. This year, the **Blueprint for Maryland's Future**, the signature educational reform bill developed by the Kirwan Commission, passed the legislature with an overwhelming bipartisan majority vote. The Blueprint bill will improve the lives of Maryland children and families through expansion of free prekindergarten, raises in teacher pay, creation of college and career readiness programs for high school students, increased academic support and behavioral health resources, and establishment of a robust system of school accountability. The Senate added important safeguards to the bill to halt the expanded programs if the state's annual revenue estimates drop by 7.5% or more, an important addition in light of concerns about the potential for an economic downturn due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This investment in our children's future is an investment in the future of Maryland, and I am confident that these new initiatives will serve to raise Maryland's national educational standing.

### **Feldman Bills**

This Session was highly productive from both a legislative perspective and in my role as **Vice Chair of the Senate Finance Committee**. I continued to work on measures to control health insurance costs and sponsored legislation to expand health care access and insurance coverage to Marylanders by putting into State law numerous consumer protections currently in jeopardy at the federal level, including those for individuals with pre-existing conditions and for Maryland families who want to keep children on their family health plan until age 26. I also sponsored legislation to promote small, early-stage Maryland technology companies by creating new programs that will assist those businesses in obtaining funding. Additionally, as Vice Chair, I had the opportunity to preside over bill hearings in the Finance Committee and play a key role in shaping the outcome of numerous important bills in the Committee such as legislation to implement the new **Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board** and expand our State's **clean energy sector and workforce**.

### **Bond Initiatives / Capital Projects**

In collaboration with my District 15 colleagues, Delegates Kathleen Dumais, David Fraser-Hidalgo and Lily Qi, I am pleased to announce that we successfully secured capital funding for three worthy projects in our area.

- **BlackRock Center for the Arts** is the leading cultural, visual and performing arts center in upper Montgomery County. This bond initiative funding will be used for capital improvements to its aging infrastructure to make the center more marketable for rentals, an income stream producing program.
- **Ivymount School** is a nonpublic special education school located in Potomac, serving 200 students with developmental disabilities. This bond initiative funding will be used to replace the school's roof.

- **Warrior Canine Connection** is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to serving our Nation's veterans and their families. The funding we secured will be used for capital improvements to its "Healing Quarters" to support its unique therapeutic service dog training program and placement of service dogs with wounded veterans. The facility is located on 80 acres of Maryland State parkland in Seneca Creek State Park in Boyds and is a model public-private partnership to serve the needs of returning warriors and veterans.

## COVID-19

Finally, we are facing one of the most onerous challenges in our lifetime – the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to address some of the pressing issues during this emergency, I am sharing in this email some trusted resources. Please check these frequently for updates as developments arise.

[Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Resources](#)

### Montgomery County Public Schools:

[Office of Student and Family Support Community Resources](#)

[School Updates](#)

### Maryland Board of Elections

Because of the coronavirus, Governor Hogan has issued a proclamation that moves Maryland's primary election date to **Tuesday, June 2, 2020**. Early voting will be conducted from May 21 through May 28. Voters who wish to cast their ballots by mail in the primary election may do so. Submit a request [online](#) and click the 'Request a Ballot' box or obtain a request form [here](#).

### Maryland Health Benefit Exchange

A [special enrollment](#) period has been opened during the coronavirus emergency for **uninsured** Marylanders. The enrollment period is Monday, March 16, through Wednesday, April 15.

### Maryland Income Tax Deadline Extension

Following the federal income tax filing deadline extension, Maryland will offer a [90-day extension](#) of the April 15 filing deadline for Maryland business and individual income taxpayers. No interest or penalty for late payments will be imposed if 2019 tax payments are made by **July 15, 2020**.

### Free Xfinity WiFi

Xfinity WiFi hotspots across the country will be available to anyone who needs them for free – including non-Xfinity Internet subscribers. Visit [Xfinity](#) for a map of Xfinity WiFi hotspots. Once at a hotspot, consumers should select the "xfinitywifi" network name in the list of available hotspots and then launch a browser.

[Maryland Business Resources](#)

[Maryland Department of Health](#)

[Coronavirus Updates from Governor Hogan](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

As always, I value your feedback and encourage you to contact me at [Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us](mailto:Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us) or call the office at 301-858-3169. You can also follow me on Facebook and Twitter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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