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Economic Matters Committee



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Dear Friend:

Thank you for contacting my office during the 2005 Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly. I received many messages from constituents during this time and I value the insight they provide. Although I try to answer every message, the volume of mail and e-mail—especially toward the latter part of the Session—makes it impossible for me to respond to them all. However, I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that the opinions from constituents like you were essential to my ability to ask pertinent questions, argue key points and educate my colleagues

Serving on the House Economic Matters Committee, my background as the only lawyer/CPA in the legislature is valuable as I consider and debate legislation on banking, energy, corporate law, insurance, telecommunications, public utilities, economic development and business regulation. In addition, I also serve on the Montgomery County Delegation's Transportation Committee allowing me to work on local transportation-related bills, a critical issue for my constituents.

I introduced and gained passage of several important pieces of legislation this Session. The Legislature passed [**HB 664, "The Biotechnology Investment Incentive Act,"**](#) which creates Maryland's first tax incentive for investing in early stage biotechnology companies. This measure will help Maryland in the fierce nationwide competition to attract these companies. The biotech industry is highly desirable because it offers higher wages and is predicted to have faster job growth.

While our State is a leader in biotechnology research and is among the top regions in the country in terms of the number of biotech firms, we lag well behind other states with respect to venture capital investment. In 2004, Maryland slipped in the highly regarded Ernst & Young biotech rankings. By granting a tax credit to biotech investors, the State is

demonstrating a clear commitment to fostering the success of early-stage companies and maintaining a leadership position in this sector.

Maryland has a new generation of veterans and their numbers are growing. This year, I sought a legislative means to address their needs as they return from duty. My bill, **HB 232**, creates a task force that will study the possibility of establishing a **State contracting preference for small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans**. The task force will also identify existing State programs to assist veterans in starting a business. The Federal Government established a procurement preference for businesses owned by service-disabled veterans in 2003. If Maryland proceeds with such a procurement program, it will be only the second state after California to do so.

The purchase of a home is the largest investment most people make during their lifetime and the State should have the means to protect consumers entering into these transactions. The recent real estate boom coinciding with budget cuts in the oversight of the real estate profession resulted in a dramatic rise in consumer complaints to the State's **Real Estate Commission**—an increase of at least 51% in the last six years. In response to the growth in new agents, transactions, and complaints, I was a lead sponsor of **HB 865**, a bill that creates a dedicated funding source for the Commission. Once this measure becomes law, the Commission **will be able to add resources and staffing to better regulate the real estate industry and address a backlog of consumer complaints**.

Another aspect of my work here entails defending worthwhile legislation to ensure its passage by the full House of Delegates. In that capacity, I defended **HB 391** on the House floor, a bill to **increase the hourly minimum pay of low-wage workers**. Under this legislation, the minimum wage in Maryland will increase \$1 to \$6.15 an hour. If the Governor signs this bill, Maryland will join 14 other states that have enacted similar legislation in response to Congress' failure to take action at the federal level. Congress last increased the minimum wage in 1997.

As a parent, I am concerned about how to protect our older children as they begin driving. Happily, I can report that several bills I cosponsored to protect teen-age drivers gained passage and will be going to the Governor's desk. These are **HB 393**, which **prohibits** a minor with a provisional license from **transporting others minors**; **HB 394** which prohibits these drivers from **using a cell phone while driving**; and **HB 395** which changes the requirements to get a license by **increasing the number of hours of supervised driving** and adding six hours of night driving.

I also cosponsored **HB 930** to require the State to seek **federal funds for youth suicide prevention programs** in schools under a 2004 federal law, helping to further develop and implement mental health programs for students.

Another measure equally important to parents is funding for education. The House allocated **\$250 million to build and renovate schools** statewide. This initiative, which passed in the House and Senate, is an increase of \$100 million over what was proposed in the

Governor's budget. Montgomery County schools will receive a total of \$307 million in State aid this year, 11.5% more than in 2005.

On the environmental front, the General Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment **to prevent the sale of parkland and open space without legislative approval**. In addition, the legislature **restored** more than **\$70 million** in cuts **to Program Open Space** protecting the State's dwindling preserves.

On an issue of particular importance to the district, I cosponsored and worked for the passage of **HB 426**, a bill to allow **Shady Grove Adventist Hospital to develop a Germantown emergency facility**. For thousands of upcounty residents, this initiative addresses a critical medical need.

In terms of local capital projects, I introduced a bond bill which **resulted in \$150,000** in State funds for the **Red Wiggler Community Farm**, an organization that provides meaningful employment to developmentally disabled adults. This money will allow the group to construct a new facility and expand their program. In addition, I worked with my fellow District 15 legislators to secure **\$100,000** in funds for the **Seneca Schoolhouse Museum** and **\$85,000** for the **Barnesville Town Hall**.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for your support through the year.

Best regards,

Brian J. Feldman