

**BENJAMIN BROOKS**  
Legislative District 10  
Baltimore County

CHIEF DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Economic Matters Committee

*Subcommittees*

Chair, Public Utilities

Alcoholic Beverages

Property and Casualty Insurance



## *The Maryland House of Delegates*

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Dear Constituents,

My last session as one of your District 10 Delegates has concluded. I am honored to have had the opportunity to represent each of you in Annapolis over the last 8 years. This session, like the others that preceded it, has brought many challenges, accomplishments and priorities. I am humbled to work with such distinguished colleagues on bringing much needed resources to Marylanders. Thank you for entrusting me. I am so pleased to share this final report of this term with you. Over the last 90 days, we have worked tirelessly to address the needs of Marylanders. Here are just a few of our accomplishments:

### ***Highlights of the FY23 budget***

#### **Structurally Balanced**

We passed a bipartisan, balanced budget for FY2023 that will fund our priorities: education, public health, state employees, environment and public safety. The budget left more than \$2.6 billion in cash resources including \$2.4 billion in the Rainy Day Fund (10% of the general fund revenues) and \$211 million in the General Fund.

The budget plan allocates \$350 million of general funds to provide tax relief including an income tax credit for many retirees; a work opportunity tax credit for employers who hire individuals with barriers to employment; and sales tax exemptions related to diapers, baby products, medical devices, oral care supplies and diabetic products.

The final budget includes more than \$650 million for legislative priorities including \$47 million for implementation of cannabis reform; \$9 million to address climate impacts; \$10 million to launch paid family leave and \$36 million to support economic development/revitalization efforts.

#### **Providing Vital Health Care Services**

Medicaid funding totals \$14 billion, allowing the State to provide coverage to 1.5 million residents.

The budget also includes \$27 million to expand Medicaid dental benefits for adults; \$30 million to serve 1,350 youth on the Autism Waiver waiting list; a 8% rate increase for most health care providers including those serving the developmentally disabled and people with behavioral health needs.

Recipients of Temporary Cash Assistance and Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP) benefits will receive an extra \$45 per month in benefits. \$10 million will be allocated for food bank, \$4.8 million to expand the Summer Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from 4,000 children to more than 50,000; \$2 million to support an increase in the benefit for the Senior SNAP, and \$6.5 million for an early phase-in of ongoing enhancements to the TDAP benefit.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Focus on State Employees</b></p> <p>Our state employees do the work of state government – human services, oversight, correctional services, and education support. Acknowledging the importance of our state personnel, the budget will provide most state employees a \$1,500 bonus, a 1% COLA, with an increment valued at about 2% of salary, in fiscal year 2022 and a 3% COLA with a supplement valued at about 2% of salary, in fiscal year 2023.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Public Safety</b></p> <p>Recognizing the spike in crime throughout our State, funding for crime prevention and victim services will be increased by about \$148 million, including \$46 million in enhanced funding for police aid distributed to target areas across the State experiencing the most violent crime, \$6.5 million for Baltimore City warrant apprehension activities and \$35 million for victim service providers.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Commitment to Public Schools</b></p> <p>The FY23 budget allocates \$800 million to the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future Fund to cover the out-year-costs of Blueprint implementation. The budget, as passed, provides record funding of \$7.9 billion in support of our public schools.</p> <p>The budget increases support to Maryland four-year public colleges and universities by 21.3% while limiting tuition increases at higher educational institutions to 2%.</p> <p>Hearing the concerns of our child care providers, post pandemic, the budget provides \$53 million of stabilization grants to these caregivers, along with bonuses for child care providers (\$16 million); a child care revolving loan fund (\$15 million); \$4 million in enhanced payment rates for therapeutic child care and \$12 billion in child care scholarships for families of limited means.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The FY22 Capital Budget – Local Projects</b></p> <p>I make it a priority to advocate for state funds to come back to the district. Our final budget includes funding for several projects in Baltimore County, including \$27.9 million towards the rebuild of Scotts Branch Elementary School.</p> <p>I was proud to sponsor and cosponsor 4 Legislative Bond Initiatives that will help fund construction projects within District 10:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Baltimore Humane Society - \$500,000</i></li> <li>• <i>St. Luke’s Affordable Housing - \$195,000</i></li> <li>• <i>St. Gabriel’s Windsor Mill Pantry - \$96,000</i></li> <li>• <i>Easter Seals Medical Adult Day Center - \$250,000</i></li> </ul>

**Public Safety**

This session we continued our work on public safety measures and juvenile justice reform to combat the rising uptake of crime in our State. While there is still work to be done, the passing of these measures brings Maryland one step closer to securing safer communities, social equality, and police reform with emphasis on transparency and accountability.

**Ghost Guns**

**HB425/SB387** prohibits a person from purchasing, receiving, selling, offering to sell or transferring an untraceable firearm (gun without a serial number). The ban will not apply to guns manufactured before October 22, 1968 or antique firearms. Passing, albeit, through without the Governor’s signature this bill is now law!

### ***Juvenile Justice Reform***

**HB459/SB691** is a wide-range juvenile justice reform effort based upon recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Reform Council (JJRC). It prohibits youth under the age of 13 from facing criminal charges, with a carve out in place for those crimes considered to be serious violent acts including murder and sexual assault. Further, the bill sets limitations on terms of probation imposed by a juvenile court, the use of detention, and out-of-home placements. It also creates a permanent Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices.

**SB53 Child Interrogation Protection Act** protects our youth from interrogation by law enforcement without the opportunity to consult with an attorney and/or notice having been provided to their parent or guardian. I was happy to join my colleagues in overriding Governor Hogan's veto to bring these protection to our young people.

### ***Legalization of Marijuana***

Right now, recreational cannabis is legal in 18 states and Washington, DC. With the passing of **HB1** and **HB837**, Maryland will be on its way to being the 19<sup>th</sup> state to end the war on marijuana. **HB837** addresses pressing criminal justice and public health issues facing legalization while building the necessary foundation to create social equity in the recreational cannabis industry. This bill also creates an equitable path to adult recreational cannabis should Marylanders vote to legalize cannabis in the 2022 General Election. **HB1**, as a constitutional amendment, will give the voters the opportunity to approve or reject the legalization of recreational cannabis. If approved by the voters, after July 1, 2023, adults 21 years or older will be allowed to use and possess cannabis.

### **Cybersecurity**

In response to cyber-attacks on state and local governments, the Cybersecurity Bill package (**HB1346, HB1205, HB1202**) reforms cybersecurity and allows for coordinated responses to cyber-attacks; centralized data sharing and emergency support services; and enhanced resources to address threats.

### ***Economic Relief:***

The "Family Budget Boosters" bills exempts the sales tax on baby products including diapers (**HB282/SB316**), car seats, baby bottles and bottle nipples (**HB288**). It also exempts sales tax on health products like dental hygiene products (**HB492/SB571**), medical devices (**HB364/SB488**) and diabetic care products (**HB1151**). This package will deliver a critical boost to family budgets and will help put more Marylanders back to work. The package also includes the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (**HB2/SB598**). Modeled after a successful federal program, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit provides a tax credit to businesses that hire and retain workers from underrepresented communities who are chronically unemployed.

**SB275 – Time to Care Act of 2022-** offers Marylanders 12 weeks of partially paid family leave each year to care for themselves or a loved one after a serious health issue and up to 24 weeks of paid leave for new parents.

### **SB405- Retirement Tax Elimination Act of 2022 –**

provides an subtraction modification on state income tax for Marylanders 65 years or older with an

### **Gas Tax Holiday**

As the country continues to witness the horrific events in Ukraine, the Maryland General Assembly acknowledged that we are all making sacrifices through the divestment from Russian goods and commerce with the passing of **HB1486/SB1010** which brings an immediate 30 day suspension of the State gas tax. With the rising inflation, this came at a time when Marylanders needed much economic relief at the pump!

adjusted gross income not to exceed \$100,000 (\$150,000, if married filing jointly). The amount of the credit is equal to \$1,000 for one individual (single) or \$1,750 for two (married filing jointly).

### ***Healthcare:***

Recognizing that many state legislatures (i.e. Texas, West Virginia, Florida and others) are taking action to restrict reproductive healthcare, the legislature passed **HB937**, the Abortion Care Access Act, to reduce the financial burden of accessing coverage for reproductive healthcare and increase the number of qualified providers in Maryland. Although this measure was vetoed by Governor Hogan, we successfully overrode his veto pre Sine Die! While **HB1171** passed through the House, it unfortunately, did not make it out of the Senate prior to Sine Die. HB1171 would have introduced a Constituent Amendment on the ballot to guarantee reproductive liberty in our state constitution.

Other important measures expand affordable and much needed healthcare to all Marylanders!

- **HB1080, Healthy Babies Equity Act** allows pregnant women and their babies access to health care coverage regardless of their immigration status. This bill will expand access to prenatal and postnatal care for thousands pregnant mothers in Maryland.
- **HB6/SB150** expands access to dental care by allowing adults with Medicaid to get dental coverage. This will expand dental coverage to the nearly 800,000 Marylanders without a plan.
- **HB413** reauthorizes the reinsurance assessment fee for large insurance companies which is used to make healthcare insurance more affordable. This assessment is projected to raise \$695 million in state funds from 2024-2028 and is expected to generate \$1.5 to \$2.5 billion in federal pass-through funds over that period. Since the reinsurance program was established by the General Assembly in 2018, it has dramatically reduced the cost of insurance in the individual market and ensured that large insurers pay their fair share into Maryland's healthcare system.

### ***Environment & Transportation***

Maryland is on a path to being a true national leader in the fight against climate change with the passing of **SB528, Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022**. As amended by the House, this landmark legislation strengthens Maryland's commitment to mitigating the effects of climate change by setting achievable goals to reduce greenhouse gases and meet the goal of net-zero statewide emissions by 2045. This bill requires Maryland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% from 2006 levels by 2031, which is 20% greater than requirements under current law. This omnibus bill creates the Maryland Commission on Climate Change, Building Energy Transition Implementation Task Force, expands EmPOWER (state's energy efficiency program), promotes expansion of electric school buses (**HB696**); and requires 100% passenger car state vehicle fleet to be Zero Emission Vehicles' (ZEV's) by 2031 and other light duty vehicles to be ZEV's by 2036 (**HB94**). **HB88/SB525 the GRID Act**, was adopted as part of the Climate Solutions Now Act. This policy will support the Public Service Commission's (PSC) distribution system planning process by establishing goals, harnessing federal funding, and requiring the PSC to adopt regulations for distribution system planning.

**HB740/SB566** requires the State Retirement and Pension System to consider the potential financial risks of the impact of climate change in investment decisions. **SB662, the Great Maryland Outdoors Act**, boosts investment in state parks.

## ***Renters' Rights***

The pandemic revealed flaws in our tenant/landlord system, leaving many renters facing evictions without proper resources and guidance. **HB571/SB279** expands funding to provide tenants with access to lawyers in eviction proceedings. **SB622** requires the comptroller to allocate \$14 million from the Unclaimed Property Fund to Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund in 2024. The governor would then have to include a provision in the 2024 budget bill to move that money from the special fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. **SB384** ensures that courts stay eviction proceedings up to 35 days when renters show they await resolution of a pending rental assistance application and **SB563** requires landlords to show proof of a valid rental license when pursuing an eviction in housing court. This will prevent illegally operating landlords from using certain streamlined eviction processes. **SB6** establishes rules and procedures for landlords who give tenants ratio utility bills or utility bills based on factors such as unit square footage or the number of bedrooms. It also requires documentation of costs to a landlord who withholds the return of a security deposit and expand protections for tenants who are victims or abuse.

## ***Education***

The pandemic brought light to the need for high-quality virtual education. **HB1163** would have required the Department of Education to study best practices for virtual education and develop criteria for the establishment of virtual schools. While this measure passed through the House, it unfortunately, stalled in the Senate. However, we were able to pass additional legislation to add funding revenues to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (**HB1450**) and Public School Construction (**HB1290**).

<p><b>HB1088/CH0029 The African American Preservation Program</b> provides needed funds to preserve more sites important to African American History, culture and heritage.</p>
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In order to protect the civil and human rights of our children in Maryland schools, **HB1255** bans schools from using physical restraints and seclusion on students.

## ***Election Reform/Redistricting***

After it was made clear that local boards intended to conduct a mass consolidation of election day polling places, the General Assembly took action quickly to prevent any chance of voter suppression. While states across the country have experienced anti-democracy legislation in recent years, Maryland will continue to be a leader and ensure equal access to the ballot and expand voting opportunities. **SB 158 -Protecting voting rights** is emergency legislation that requires the State Board of Elections and local boards of elections to provide at least the same number of in-person precinct polling locations in the 2022 election as were available during the 2018 election. Further it mandates that the state and counties equally split the cost for purchasing, operating and maintaining statewide voting systems.

The U.S. Constitution requires Maryland to redraw its congressional and legislative district lines every 10 years following the census. The federal government stipulates that districts must have nearly equal populations and must not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. This session we came together to write and re-write both congressional and legislative maps. While there was some concern regarding the partisanship of those maps, ultimately, a revised congressional map was passed and signed by the Governor (**SB1012**). While the legislative map remains in litigation, the magistrate recommended the pending challenges to the map be dismissed. We are hopeful that the legislative map will be finalized without the need for the hearing scheduled for April 13<sup>th</sup>.

## ***My Legislative Initiatives***

This session I introduced 20 bills ranging from local bills that directly impact Baltimore County and District 10 to statewide measures. I was proud to work alongside advocates from the Maryland State Bar Association, Maryland Farm Bureau, Public Service Commission, Department of Human Services, the workers' compensation community and academia. Together we successfully passed legislation to offer clarity to ambiguous statutes pertaining to the corporations and associations articles (**HB996 & HB999**), and operating and partnership agreements (**HB342**). **HB650** would have aligned Workers' Compensation (WC) recoveries with personal injury recoveries by specifying which WC benefits can be garnished for child support. Unfortunately, it didn't quite make it through third reader in the Senate prior to Sine Die (I will plan to pre-file this bill next year!). As Chair of the Public Utilities Sub-Committee, I understand the importance of underground utilities. I introduced and passed two bills (**HB350 & HB994**) that will enhance the Miss Utility system.

Locally, I addressed the concerns of farmers with **HB682**, aligning Baltimore County with the other 23 counties in Maryland, allowing farmers to hunt non-game mammals and birds without a license. In an effort to address the food deserts in Baltimore County, **HB680** will provide a tax incentive in the form of a property tax credit to grocery stores that open or renovate in these areas. **SB557** (which I cross-filed in the House), creates the West Baltimore Redevelopment Authority (the first of its kind on the west side!). This will afford us the ability to increase reinvestment in our community and economic development on the Liberty Road corridor.

For our most distinguished residents, **HB186, Subtraction Modification for Centenarians**, excludes the first \$100,000 of income from state income taxes for residents who are 100 years young.

Other measures including subtraction modifications for Passive House, Indoor Air Quality, Veterans and Retirement Income, and Financial Literacy Pilot Program, unfortunately, did not make it out of Committee. While these measures didn't pass this year, I will continue to fight for these measures should I have the honor of continuing to represent District 10, next year.

While the 444th legislative session has ended, my work continues in the District. If my office can provide any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us at [benjamin.brooks@house.state.md.us](mailto:benjamin.brooks@house.state.md.us).

With kindest regards,



Benjamin Brooks