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Legislative District 10
Baltimore County

CHIEF DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Economic Matters Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Public Utilities

Alcoholic Beverages

Property and Casualty Insurance



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Dear Constituents,

I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to represent the people of District 10 in the Maryland General Assembly's (MGA) 442nd legislative session. This assembly was unprecedented as we attempted to get back to work amidst a pandemic and a social justice awakening among other pressing issues. We entered this period with a lot of work to be done and I am so proud of everything that my colleagues and I were able to accomplish through the introduction of new legislation, reintroduction of previous legislation and the overriding of vetoes. The MGA has made significant strides towards pandemic relief, revitalizing the economy, police reform and the resolution of other critical matters. This legislative body effectively passed hundreds of bills that will go a long way in helping the citizens of Maryland. I'd like to take the time to highlight a few.

State Budget-Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22)/Capital Budget

Maryland once again is leading the way with the passing of its bipartisan budget totaling \$52.4 billion. After facing a billion dollar deficit due to the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the FY22 budget eliminates the structural deficit for the next two years, restores the Rainy Day Fund and generates a surplus to account for unforeseen impacts from COVID. The budget fully funds healthcare and education while putting \$1.5 billion into construction projects to get people back to work.

The Capital Budget leverages nearly \$2 billion in state capital spending, prioritizes education, recreation and support for localities. In addition to the \$2.2 billion dedicated to school construction, the budget provides an extra \$320 million to build schools, modernize classrooms and provide the necessary equipment so schools can safely re-open. State and local parks will receive \$130 million to maintain the infrastructure and playgrounds due to record use. The budget also approves a record 275 bond initiative requests, totaling over \$75 million, to stimulate local investments.

Veto Overrides

This session, the MGA was successful in overriding many of the Governor's vetoes of legislation that was passed during the 2020 legislative session. These key pieces of legislation will bring a world class education to all Maryland students, regardless of zip-code (**HB1300**); lower the cost of prescription drugs for Marylanders (**HB1095**); close a loophole in gun safety and require background checks on long gun transfers (**HB4**); reform the criminal justice system to establish women's pre-release (**HB801**); and

promote a tobacco free Maryland by implementing taxes on big tech companies to increase their contribution to the economic infrastructure of Maryland (**HB732**).

COVID-19 Legislation

As legislators, one of our main priorities was addressing the impact COVID-19 has had on Marylanders (i.e. residents, students, teachers, small businesses and essential workers).

- **HB612/SB496: Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act** – Passed as emergency legislation. This bill provides financial assistance (\$509 million in spending and provides over \$1 billion in tax relief and credits) to residents and businesses in order to bolster the economy during fiscal years 2021 and 2022 for the purpose of relieving the adverse effects of the coronavirus pandemic.
 - Raises Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
 - Exempts unemployment insurance (UI) payments from State income tax
 - Provides Stimulus payments for low-income Marylanders
 - Allows small businesses & non-profits to defer payments of UI taxes
 - Forgives Maryland taxes on COVID loans & grants
 - Coverts up to \$50,000 in Equity Participation Loans to grants

This bill has already been signed into law by Governor Hogan.

- **SB218 - Income Tax-Child Tax Credit and Expansion of Earned Income Credit**: Expands Maryland's \$1.5 billion RELIEF package to eligible Marylanders with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- **HB1322: Primary and Secondary Education - School Personnel - Prohibition on Retaliation for Not Returning to In-Person Instruction and Work** – Educators should not have to decide between their job and their health. HB1322 requires the State and County Boards of Education to allow certain school personnel to instruct and work remotely to the extent practicable during the 2020-21 school year without facing retaliation. This measure is on its way to the Governor.
- **HB123/SB3: Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021** - This bill, subject to a certain limitations, requires the Maryland healthcare system to include telehealth practices and make these services more readily available to individuals in need.

Hearing about the frustrations and challenges many of my constituents experienced applying for and receiving their unemployment benefits, revealed a process that was fraught with problems and a system that needed repair. The **Unemployment Insurance Reform Package** makes immediate and structural fixes that will help streamline the Unemployment (UI) process and make the system more efficient.

- Modernizes the UI system to ensure Marylanders can get the money they deserve
- Improves customer service
- Creates more accountability
- Plans for the next emergency

Another key measure that was introduced, passed by the House but did not make it through the Senate includes:

HB581- Essential Workers' Protection Act: The House Economic Matters Committee spent a tremendous amount of time and effort to establish protections for essential workers during a catastrophic health emergency. The related responsibilities of each employer were factored into the benefit of the essential worker.

Police & Other Social Justice Reform

Being witness to recurring violence against our black and brown communities, the **Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021 (HB670)** ensures the equal treatment of **ALL** Marylanders and helps to restore the trust in policing by the community. The Police Reform and Accountability Act fully repeals the Law Officers' Bill of Rights (LEBOR), enhances civilian-driven transparency in police misconduct, supports civilian complaints, imposes swift and uniform penalties for police wrongdoings and prohibits police agencies from destroying or expunging police misdeeds and disciplinary records. This ominous bill was passed through both chambers with bipartisan support. Despite having majority support, Governor Hogan vetoed this measure. With a two-thirds majority, we successfully overrode the veto, making Maryland the first state to repeal the LEOBR and enact historical accountability measures.

Further, **Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 (SB71)** requires for the first time ever that all local and state law enforcement officers wear body cameras by 2025. Law enforcement agencies must establish **Employee Assistance and Early Intervention Programs** to: (a) identify officers who are at-risk for engaging in the use of excessive force, (b) provide officers who are identified with retraining and behavioral interventions, (c) reassignments or other appropriate responses to reduce the risk or use of abhorrent behavior and, (d) establish a program that provides access to voluntary and confidential services needed to address the mental health issues experienced by of an officer stemming from personal and work-related challenges, (my bill!).

- **SB178, Anton's Law-** This legislation is named after Maryland Resident Anton Black who died at the hands of the police in Greensboro, Maryland back in 2018. It is widely believed that the police department responsible for Anton's death engaged in a cover up plan to shield their direct involvement in his demise. Anton's law alters the state of public information specifically in regards to the examination of police records. Under Anton's Law the public will have greater access to investigate officers' history of complaints and abuse of power.

Additionally, the bill puts greater restrictions on how and when no-knock warrants may be served.

- **Walter Lomax Act (HB742)** - This legislation is named after Walter Lomax who was wrongfully convicted of a crime in Maryland and spent 39 years in prison before being exonerated in 2006. This bill alters the way in which an exoneree applies and is compensated for a wrongful conviction. This bill not only stabilizes the process of reparations for wrongful convictions but also improves a wrongfully convicted person's ability to obtain assistance in areas like education, housing, and health care.
- **SB178: Maryland Accountability Act of 2021- Baltimore City**- After 50 years of being under state control, this bill returns the Baltimore City Police Department to local control, contingent on the ratification of an amendment by the voters of Baltimore City.
- **SB494 - Juvenile Restoration Act** –This bill ends juvenile life sentences without parole; individuals who were convicted as adults for an offense committed as a minor may be considered for parole after being imprisoned for at least 20 years for the offense. While Governor Hogan vetoed this measure, the legislative body overrode that veto prior to Sine Die.
- **SB202- Correctional Services- Parole- Life Imprisonment-** Decisions about parole should never be political. SB202 takes the Governor out of parole decisions for those who are sentenced to life in prison after 20 years. This bill ensures the parole process is independent and fair.

I am very proud of the critical step that Maryland has made to build transparency and oversight in policing across the State. These measures help to create communities that amplify our diverse population and establish neighborhoods in which all Marylanders can feel safe and flourish.

- **HB16 – Dignity Not Detention Act-** Maryland should not profit off the unnecessary incarceration of immigrants or be complicit in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) inhumane treatment of immigrants held in detention centers. HB16 bans private immigration prisons, stops new detention center contracts and grandfathers out its three existing detention centers.

- **Housing Relief Package**-housing legislation is designed to address issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic with focus on strengthening the landlord tenant process in the future. The House's dedication to addressing the shortcomings of Marylanders has resulted in multiple bills passing to give much needed relief and to do what is necessary to protect individuals and families across the state. Some bills, as part of the relief package, include requiring a tenant's right to counsel in specific eviction cases (**HB18/SB154**), increasing the filing fee for an eviction (**HB31**) and freezing rent increases during a health emergency.
- **HB409 - Juvenile Restoration Act** - This bill's intent is to change the fate of minors who are potential candidates for incarceration and those who have already entered the penal system. For juveniles who have already been convicted, this bill would allow the courts to reevaluate their heavy sentences (from 30 to life) after 20 years of time served. For future juvenile delinquents, this legislation prohibits judges from sentencing minors to life without the possibility of parole and further allows judges to issue a sentence less than the maximum. The bill redefines the way in which juveniles are treated in the criminal justice system and ultimately provides them with more hope for the future. While Governor Hogan vetoed this measure, we were able to override his veto, confirming that this bill will be law.

HB1/SB1: Historically Black Colleges and Universities - Funding

In 2006, students, alumni and advocates of HBCU's filed a lawsuit against the State of Maryland alleging the State had failed these institutions through underfunding resulting in their inability to compete with their white counterpart institutions. After several contentious legal battles, and federal ruling in favor of the HBCU's, Maryland failed to adequately remedy this neglect. This bill is aimed at bettering the conditions of black higher education in Maryland by requiring the Governor, in each of fiscal years 2023 through 2032, to include in the annual State operating budget \$57,000,000 to be allocated to Maryland's four historically black colleges and universities. HB1 provides funding to resolve the program duplication issues in Maryland four HBCU's (Morgan, Bowie, Coppin, and University of Maryland Eastern Shore) and level the playing field for all students- regardless of background, or race, or the college they attend.

Climate Change/Environmental

As passed by the House, **The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2021 (HB583)**, was dedicated to the realistic and robust measures to combat climate change in Maryland. This measure would have created jobs, saved lives and reduced our contribution to the climate crisis. It supported and encouraged public and private tree plantings and restoration efforts; extended high performance building requirements to capital projects funded with 25% State funding; invested in community solar by offering tax exemptions

from community solar energy generating systems and created new targeted goals for state greenhouse gas reductions.

While I was disappointed that this measure did not make it through both chambers prior to Sine Die, we will continue to work towards these goals next session. I am happy to report that other legislation addressing climate change successfully passed.

- **HB569- Electricity Net Energy Metering:** HB569 doubles the state capacity for residential rooftop solar and community projects.
- **SB65- Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (Qualifying Biomass (Black Liquor):** SB65 removes black liquor (a by-product of paper mills and caustic pollutant that makes its way into our air and waters) from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard.
- **HB507-Clean Water Commerce Act:** As amended, this bill stops the sunset of the fund and increases the allocation from the Bay Restoration Fund Wastewater Account from roughly \$10 Million up to \$20 Million through 2030.

Education

- **HB1372: Blueprint 2.0** - This bill adds revisions to the Blueprint in response to the current status of education due to the pandemic and provides more support to address learning loss, expands behavioral and mental health resources; closes the digital divide with more access to broadband and devices and requires better reporting and data tracking for more accountability.
- **HB894: Community College Collective Bargaining** - This bill enables community college employees to unionize and hold elections if they want to, but it does not mandate unionization. It simply grants all community college employees the legal right to bargain collectively.

HB940-Gaming- Regulation of Fantasy Gaming Competitions & Implementation of Sports Wagering - This bill makes Maryland the 21st state in the nation to legalize sports betting and increases funding for education

Election Reform

- **HB745: Election Law-Early Voting Centers** – This bill modernizes the state’s formula for Early Voting centers and will result in over a dozen new centers across the state of the 2022 election.
- **HB1048- Permanent Absentee Ballot List-** This bill makes voting easier and more convenient by creating a permanent mail-in ballot option.

My Legislative Initiatives

During this legislative session I introduced 12 bills. This was a very special year as the legislation I brought forth covered such a variety of issues within our community and the state of Maryland as a whole. My legislation aimed to address salient issues from police reform, to emissions reduction, to benefits for disabled veterans and everything in between. I am very proud of the bills that I developed this session because I truly believe that they were reflective of the needs and concerns of my constituents. A few highlights are:

- **HB1178- First Time Home Buyers Savings Account** – creates a tax-free savings account for all first-time homebuyers so an equal path to homeownership can be afforded to all Marylanders. This measure is on its way to the Governor!
- **HB88- Police Officers-Mental Health-Employee Assistance Programs** – provides necessary resources to our Officers to seek mental health support without negatively affecting their careers. When an officer comes to the door of one of my constituents, I want to make sure they are at their best. The intent of HB88 was incorporated in the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021.

While other key measures that I introduced including tax relief for Centenarians and Passive Homes didn’t pass this session, I will continue to advocate for these changes and will plan to re-introduce these bills next year.

Lastly, this session we lost an icon in the Maryland legislature. Senate President Emeritus, Thomas V. “Mike” Miller was a Titan in Maryland politics. He was the longest serving President of the Maryland Senate. I hope that we honored his legacy and he is proud of the work this legislative body was able to accomplish.

While the session has adjourned, my work will continue as I return to the District Office. Due to Covid-19, tele-working will be the platform of choice until the pandemic is over. If my office can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to reach out via email at Benjamin.brooks@house.state.md.us or by phone at 410-496-4037. Please stay healthy, be kind and continue to monitor updates on the Coronavirus.

With kindest regards,



Delegate Benjamin Brooks

HB665 - Would have given Maryland voters the right to choose who represents them at the county level, defeating a tool that disenfranchises voters by requiring commissioners to live in a specific district but electing them at-large. While this measure passed through the House, it unfortunately, did not make it through the Senate prior to Sine Die.