

**BENJAMIN BROOKS**  
Legislative District 10  
Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the  
Environment Committee  
Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal  
Service Program Workgroup



**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
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Dear Constituent,

April 11, 2023

At midnight on April 10th, we concluded the 445th Maryland General Assembly legislative session. I was humbled and appreciative to be sent back to Annapolis by you, my constituents, but this time as your Senator. I was assigned to the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee where I had the opportunity to learn and lead on issues ranging from offshore wind power to HVACR licensing reform to promoting native plants. Overall, the body tackled many issues this session and I am proud of the work my 46 new colleagues and I were able to accomplish in the Senate. Here is a final report on some of our achievements these past 90 days:

## MY LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

Prior to and during the Legislative Session, I worked with constituents, advocacy groups, and other lawmakers to develop meaningful legislation for Baltimore County and Maryland. Here are a few of the 21 bills I introduced this session that successfully passed both chambers and are on their way to the Governor:

| BILL   | ISSUE                   | DESCRIPTION   | Status           |
|--|-------------------------|---|------------------|
| <b>SB32</b> - Property Tax - Exemption for Dwellings of Disabled Veterans - Application                                      | Veterans/<br>Tax Relief | This bill expands the type of qualified documentation allowed under the residential property tax exemption for a disabled veteran or a surviving spouse to include a rating report. This small change streamlines the process to ensure more of our Veterans can qualify for the property tax exemption credit. | Passed<br>(45-0) |
| <b>SB23/HB132</b> - Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning, and Refrigeration Services - Journeyman License - Qualifications | Labor                   | This bill aims to increase the passing rate on the State HVACR journeyman license exam by increasing the number of training hours for applicants.   | Passed<br>(45-0) |
| <b>SB836/HB950</b> - Maryland Native Plants Program  | Environment             | This bill encourages and promotes the use and sale of plants native to Maryland at certain businesses and requires the University of Maryland Extension to  | Passed<br>(46-0) |

|  |               |   |                |
|--|---------------|---|----------------|
|  |               | develop several programs to promote native plants and educate the public about them.  |                |
| <b>SB71/HB800</b> - Execution on a Judgment - Child Support Arrearages - Workers' Compensation                             | Child Support | This bill specifies that if someone owes child support payments and has a workers' compensation claim, 25% of what they receive after expenses will go towards paying off their outstanding child support debt if a judgment has been made.   | Passed (46-0)  |
| <b>SB320/HB188</b> - Natural Resources - Wildlife Advisory Commission - Membership   | Environment   | This bill expands the Wildlife Advisory Commission by mandating the Governor to appoint an academic researcher with expertise in wildlife biology, conservation, management, or ecology. Additionally, it requires representation from the hunting, wildlife preservation, and passive wildlife recreation communities on the Commission. | Passed (45-0)  |
| <b>SB443/HB662</b> - Real Estate Brokers, Salespersons, and Associate Brokers - Continuing Education Courses - Alterations | Real Estate   | This bill alters the requirements for the subject matter of continuing education courses for licensees issued an initial license by the Real Estate Commission.   | Passed (45-0)  |
| <b>SB613/HB908</b> - Electricity – Community Solar Energy Generating Systems Program                                       | Clean Power   | This bill makes permanent the community solar program and improves the ability of low-income Marylanders to participate in the program by creating the option for consolidated billing.   | Passed (34-11) |
| <b>SB489/HB692</b> - Public Service Commission - Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity - Local Permits          | Utilities     | This bill fixes a regulatory gap, thus encouraging solar projects in local counties and municipalities.   | Passed (37-10) |

Working with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, other Veteran advocates and Veteran Legislators, including Senator Bryan Simonaire and Delegate Mike Rogers, we passed bipartisan legislation providing free burials for the spouses and dependents of Veterans. The contents of **SB490 (my bill)** were incorporated in **SB286**, demonstrating the importance of working across the aisle for the citizens of Maryland.

I was humbled to work with the disability community, including the National Federation for the Blind and Maryland Association of the Deaf, to bring forth **SB488** to study the creation of an electronic ballot return system to improve voting accessibility for individuals with a disability, Marylanders living abroad and deployed uniformed services voters; and **SB400**, which would require motion picture houses to offer open captioning showings twice per week per film. While I'm disappointed that these measures did not pass, both of these bills were referred to interim studies. This will allow us the opportunity to work with all stakeholders from both sides of the debate to get a better understanding of what the potential issues could reveal or yield so that we can put forth more comprehensive legislation next session.

I was also happy to re-introduce **SB316** which would expand financial literacy courses in Maryland public high schools and **SB49**, which would extend pension exclusion (\$34,300 for 2022) to non-qualified retirement plans (i.e. IRAs, SEP, 401K rollovers). I will continue to advocate for the passage of these measures next session.

## **A BUDGET FOR EVERYONE**

One of the Maryland General Assembly's most critical responsibilities is balancing and approving the State's budget. Through collaboration with Governor Moore, the Maryland General Assembly passed a bipartisan balanced FY2024 budget that weighs the needs of the State with savings for its residents. Here are a few highlights:

- \$200 Million for tax relief for working families and veterans.
- An additional \$46 Million (above the statutory minimum) for police aid, in addition to \$40 Million for state support for victim's services and targeted increases to support domestic violence victims and rape crisis centers and victim services enhancements.
- \$14 Billion for Medicaid, helping cover over 1.5 Million Maryland residents.
- \$8.5 Million to eliminate the senior care waitlist.
- \$250 Million to address the Climate Crisis, including, \$160 Million for state parks and forests for the Great Maryland Outdoors Act, \$60 Million for bay restoration, \$15 Million for Tree Solutions Now Act and \$15 Million for Climate Solutions Now Act.
- \$900 Million For the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund. This investment will help protect our public schools in case of an economic downturn.
- \$200 Million for flexible transportation funds if we are eligible for competitive grants under federal funding.
- \$421.2 Million for salary increases and bonuses to "rebuild state government" which saw historic vacancy rates during the prior administration.
- \$2.85 Billion in reserve including \$2.50 in the rainy-day fund and \$351 Million in the general fund.
- \$825,826,498 for Baltimore County with \$4,000,000 to support renovations of Security Square Mall, \$750,000 to fund the West Baltimore Redevelopment Authority, \$3,000,000 for infrastructure improvements to Randallstown Library, and many other important projects in District 10 and throughout Baltimore County.

## **DELIVERING FOR DISTRICT 10**

The District 10 Unity Team was able to bring home \$3,199,000 in funds for several community projects. We are proud to deliver for our constituents thus making District 10 and Baltimore County a better place to live, work, and raise a family:

| <b>PROJECT</b>                   | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>   | <b>FUNDING</b> |
|----------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Agriculture Technology Incubator | Provides support and resources to farmers which enables the delivery of fresh produce within 24 hours. | \$100,000      |

|  |  |             |
|--|--|-------------|
| Chase Brexton Health Services Center Relocation              | Brings a new full-service medical clinic and pharmacy to serve the community.                                    | \$250,000   |
| Liberty Community Development Youth Center                   | Expands the youth center.  | \$100,000   |
| St. Luke's Church Multi Space Community Computer Lab Project | Creates a fully equipped state-of-the-art computer lab, storage, and an administrative office for the community. | \$200,000   |
| Reisterstown Community Cemetery                              | Grants funding for the ironwork and headstone repairs in this historic cemetery.                                 | \$49,000    |
| Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum                   | Allows for improvements to this historical center.   | \$2,000,000 |
| Pearlstone Center  | Provides funding for enhancements of this educational facility.  | \$500,000   |

## AN AMBITIOUS SESSION

This year, the Legislature made great strides in addressing education, clean energy, gun safety, public safety, and healthcare. The House of Delegates introduced 1,301 bills and the Senate introduced 974. Here are some highlights:

### EDUCATION

Governor Moore made education and service a priority of his Administration with \$8.7 billion set aside for Pre-K – 12 funding in FY24. As legislators, we are helping lay a firm foundation for the future by promoting volunteerism for our youth and creating more comprehensive and accessible programs for ALL students. Additionally, we are creating programs to advance and elevate Maryland's talented teachers and effectively distribute college savings to hard-working families.

**SERVE Act of 2023 (SB551)** This bill creates Governor Moore's Service Year Program for recent high school graduates and other individuals to promote volunteerism in the state. For one year, participants would work 30 hours a week alongside an on-site mentor at a participating employer with an hourly wage of \$15.

**Maryland 529 Reform- (SB959)** The Maryland College Investment Plan performed flawlessly, but the Maryland Prepaid College Trust was rife with problems. This bill will abolish the board and make the State Treasurer responsible for the program.

**Maryland Educator Shortage Act of 2023 (HB1219)** This bill would task the State Department of Education and the Maryland Higher Education Commission to create goals to recruit and retain Maryland teachers.

**Special Education– Attorney's Fees and Related Costs (HB1237)** This bill authorizes a court to award reasonable attorney fees and related costs to a parent of a child with a disability if the parent prevails in a procedure to resolve disputes about the identification, evaluation, or education placements.

## ENVIRONMENT AND CLEAN POWER

We have a Bold and Green Agenda for Maryland. Investments in clean power and our environment will make the state greener, cleaner, and more efficient for generations to come. This year we banned harmful chemicals, adopted zero-emissions standards for certain vehicles, and promoted off-shore wind power.

**Banning Harmful Chemicals (SB158/HB319)** Bans the use of a man-made chemical, polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), aka forever chemicals, in pesticides. Manufacturers of these agents must submit a test to the Maryland Department of Agriculture to prove their product is absent of PFAS.

**Maryland Sustainable Buildings Act of 2023 (HB6)** Establishes standards to reduce the amount of energy-inefficient building practices and provides incentives for environmentally friendly building practices.

**Clean Trucks Act (SB234/HB420)** Adopts the California Air Resources Board's (CARB) vehicle standards and requires vehicle manufacturers to sell an increasing percentage of new zero-emission trucks and school buses through 2035.

**Clean Transportation Act (HB550)** As the companion to the Clean Trucks Act, provides incentives for the purchase and sale of electric medium and heavy-duty trucks and charging stations and enables additional support for the installation of electric vehicle charging stations.

**POWER Act (SB781)** Sets a new target for offshore wind generation and protects ratepayers against unnecessary impacts.

**Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB470)** Sets a target of protecting 30% of Maryland's lands by 2030 and 40% by 2040. It also authorizes funding for a revolving loan fund and other programs to help achieve these goals.

**Forest Retention and Preservation (SB526/HB723)** Encourages the State to preserve forests and develop incentives for private landowners to preserve forests.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

As the increasing number of mass shootings in Maryland and throughout the United States demonstrates, addressing senseless gun violence is one of the most urgent issues we face. Unfortunately, there is no one public policy that can serve as an end-all solution. Achieving a meaningful impact on reducing gun violence will require a broad set of policies including safe storage requirements, firearm tracking and open carrying guidelines. While there is still work to be done, we believe passing these measures gets us one step closer to securing the safety that our residents demand.

**Gun Safety Act of 2023 (SB1)** Prohibits a person from knowingly wearing, carrying, or transporting a firearm within 100 yards of a place of public accommodation, such as a park, movie theater, restaurant, courthouse, etc.

**Gun Tracking (SB185/ HB3)** Requires the Maryland State Police Gun Center to track more accurately information on firearms surrendered due to peace orders.

**Jaelynn's Law (SB858)** Improves firearm storage requirements to prevent children from accessing unsafely stored weapons, which has led to deadly accidents in recent years. The

Maryland Department of Public Health Services will also develop a guide on youth suicide prevention and safe firearm storage for gun owners.

**Gun Possession (HB824)** Raises the legal age to purchase a firearm from 18 to 21 and expands the prohibition on who can purchase a firearm.

## HEALTHCARE

Maryland should be a leader in healthcare access and treatment. This year, we prioritized improving access to quality care, protecting patient privacy, and improving mental health treatment strategies.

**Reproductive Health Service Plans (SB341/ HB477)** Requires the Maryland public colleges and other higher education facilities to develop a plan to make a comprehensive range of reproductive health services available on campus in cooperation with students and the Maryland Department of Health.

**Reproductive Health Protection Act (SB859/ HB808)** Prohibits a Maryland judge from sharing information or cooperating with an investigation into the violation of another state's reproductive health laws unless the alleged violation also violates Maryland Laws.

**Protected Information for Reproductive Health (SB786/ HB812)** Prevents reproductive healthcare and medication information from being shared across state lines in medical information exchanges. Patients must give approval for information to be shared.

**Youth Adult Health Insurance Subsidies Pilot Program (SB601/HB814)** Extends a program that provides lower-income adults aged 18-34 with state funding to help cover insurance premiums. With this bill, the program is extended for 3 years.

**9-8-8 Trust Fund (SB3/HB271)** Requires the Governor to include in the annual budget bill for fiscal year 2025 an appropriation of \$12 Million to the 9-8-8 Trust Fund (Suicide and Crisis Hotline).

**Mental Health Awareness and Database (SB154)** Mandates the Maryland Department of Health to create a public awareness campaign promoting mental health advance directives and requires a study on accessing an advanced directive database during behavioral health crises.

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

This legislative session saw the passage of several key bills aimed at promoting social justice and addressing long-standing issues.

**Child Victims Act of 2023 (HB1/ SB686)** Removes the statute of limitations on child sex abuse and allows individuals victimized as children to sue their abusers and the institution where the abuse took place.

**Fair Wage Act of 2023 (SB555)** Raises the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, rather than waiting until 2025.

**Family Prosperity Act of 2023 (SB552/HB547)** Permanently expands the earned income tax credit.

**Cannabis Reform (SB516/ HB556)** Renames the Alcohol and Tobacco Commission to the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Cannabis

**Hate Crimes (SB5)** allows victims of hate crimes to file a civil suit against the person(s) who committed the act and seek economic and non-economic damages.



Commission. Establishes licensing and tax rates needed to open a recreational marijuana market on July 1, 2023, after voters approved a constitutional amendment in November. All businesses that have a license to distribute medical cannabis will be able to get a dual license to sell recreational marijuana and there will be additional licenses made available with an emphasis on equity concerns. The tax will be 9%. Adults 21 and over will be able to possess up to 1.5 ounces of cannabis and two marijuana plants.

## VETERANS

As a Vietnam War Veteran, I am proud to serve those who have selflessly served our country. Veterans bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to our communities and workforce. I am proud to have co-sponsored several bills aimed at retaining and promoting the welfare of our State's heroes.

**Keep Our Heroes Home Act (SB553/ HB554)** This bill, as requested by the administration, will expand the tax exemptions for military retirement income to \$20,000 for senior veterans and \$12,500 for younger ones.

**Healthcare for Heroes Act of 2023 (SB554)** This Administration bill establishes a TRICARE Premium Reimbursement Program in the Military Department. The department may award grants of up to \$60 per month to an eligible recipient.

**Charlotte Hall Emergency Oversight (SB974)** Requires contractors operating State-owned nursing homes to promptly provide notice of certain deficiencies, citations, and fines to the State.

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Once again, I am honored to serve as your Senator, and I am grateful that I can advocate for your interests in Annapolis. Including everything from funding for critical community projects to taking immense steps in expanding green energy, gun safety, healthcare access, education and veterans' assistance, our future is looking bright in District 10 and in our State! While the 445th legislative session has ended, my work continues in the District. If my office can be of support, please contact us so we can assist you with your constituent needs.

With kindest regards,



Senator Benjamin Brooks