



April 8, 2014

Dear Friend:

The 434th session of the Maryland General Assembly ended last night April 7 at midnight after 90 days of intense work.

As always, I would like to thank everyone who emailed, wrote, called or otherwise contacted me to express their opinion on the many bills that we considered this year.

My Legislation

I am pleased that the General Assembly approved several of my bills this year.

[House Bill 18](#) - The costs of a college education have risen significantly over the past decade, even as a college degree has become more necessary to succeed in today's economy. An increasing number of college students are financing their education by taking out loans. Over half the students in the state are borrowing to pay for college, graduating with an average debt of \$24,000.

I've heard from parents that it can be difficult to get a clear picture of the total cost of attending a college and the amount of financial aid that is being offered. To bring transparency to the cost of higher education, House Bill 18 will require all public institutions of higher education to provide freshmen with information on the cost of enrollment and financial aid options. This information will allow students to more accurately compare costs between schools and avoid taking on too much debt.

[House Bill 165](#) - This bill clarifies the membership and duties of the State's Financial

Education and Capability Commission, which I co-chair. Last year, the Commission examined issues pertaining to the cost of a college education; this year, we are likely to examine issues related to saving for retirement. If you have any suggestions, please let me know!

[House Bill 878](#) – Several state policies encourage residents and businesses to compost yard waste. One of the best ways to encourage use of compost is for the State Highway Administration (SHA) to utilize compost more extensively, as is done in several other States. This bill will require SHA to specify composting for use in sediment, erosion control and stormwater management and other applications, practices that are already approved by the Maryland Department of the Environment.

[House Bill 947](#) – We take for granted that balconies in apartments or other multifamily dwellings will be safe. When they're not, the results can be tragic. Over the past three years, there have been more than a dozen balcony railing breaks, including three in Maryland. These breaks can be deadly. Massachusetts and various cities and counties throughout the country have enacted laws and ordinances requiring residential balconies to be inspected. Under House Bill 947, political subdivisions will be required to have wood balcony railings in multifamily dwellings inspected every 5 years.

In addition, I sponsored [House Bill 828](#), which provides Jewish Community Services (JCS), an agency of the Associated Jewish Community Federation, \$50,000 for capital repairs at several of its Alternative Living Units in Baltimore County. JCS owns several homes that provide important services to adult residents with developmental disabilities. The capital funding provided by this bill was folded in this year's capital budget.

The Budget

The budget in Maryland is again focused on funding citizens' priorities of education, transportation, the environment, public safety and jobs. We are one of only ten states to have a Triple-A bond rating and this budget keeps us fiscally sound. Despite sluggish revenue growth, the budget maintains current services, funds several needed initiatives and does not raise taxes.

- Fully funds K-12 education (\$6.1 billion);
- Provides \$275 million for school construction and modernizing classrooms;
- Includes \$4.3 million initiative to expand prekindergarten programs;
- Increases funding for higher education and limits in-state undergraduate tuition growth to 3%;
- Expands access to affordable healthcare (\$8.1 billion Medicaid);

- Funds environmental priorities;
- Increases funding for economic development programs;
- Leaves a cash balance of nearly \$900 million, including the Rainy Day fund;
- Provides State employee cost-of-living and merit increases; and
- Avoids any cuts to retiree benefits.

Also, part of the budget debate this year concerned the American Studies Association (ASA) academic boycott of Israel. I am pleased that as part of the budget, we approved the following language:

“The General Assembly declares that it is the policy of the State to (1) reaffirm our Declaration of Cooperation with State of Israel that has resulted in the successful exchange of commerce, culture, technology, tourism, trade, economic development, scholarly inquiry, and academic cooperation; (2) oppose Maryland public institutions’ support of the...movement Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions; (3) condemn the American Studies Association’s boycott against institutions of higher education in Israel...”

Minimum Wage: Maryland’s current minimum wage rate, which tracks the federal minimum wage, is \$7.25 per hour. This equates to roughly \$15,000 a year for a full-time minimum wage worker. Despite periodic increases to the State and federal minimum wage rates, inflation has caused significant erosion of the purchasing power of the minimum wage. In 1968, when the real value of the minimum wage reached its peak, the purchasing power of the minimum wage was greater than \$10.70 per hour in today’s dollars.

[House Bill 187](#) will increase the minimum wage on a gradual basis, so that the rate becomes \$10.10 per hour in July 2018. Businesses will be allowed to pay a lower training wage (85 percent of the state minimum wage) to workers under the age of 20 for their first six months of employment.

I supported this bill because of the low-buying power of today’s minimum wage, and because many workers who earn minimum wage are heads of households. Hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers will benefit from an increase to \$10.10/hour.

Marijuana Reform

This year, the legislature passed landmark bills that decriminalized possession of small amounts of marijuana and will make marijuana available on a medical basis. I want to congratulate my colleagues Senator Bobby Zirkin and Delegate Dan Morhaim for the lead roles they played in enacting the decriminalization and medical

marijuana bills, respectively.

Decriminalization: We joined 17 other states in approving decriminalization of possession of small amounts (10 grams and under) of marijuana. Possession of small amounts will be subject to a \$100 fine for the first offense; the penalty for a second offense will be \$250, for a third offense, \$500. A third-time offender will have to go to court and will have to enter an education or treatment program.

I supported this legislation ([Senate Bill 364](#)) because decriminalization has not increased marijuana use in the 17 other states that have made possession of small amounts a civil violation. Current criminal penalties for marijuana possession have been enforced in a disparate way (minorities are arrested in much greater proportion), and possession of small amounts of marijuana should not tarnish someone's record with a criminal conviction. Penalties for marijuana distribution and possession of larger amounts of marijuana are unchanged. I hope to see the savings in law enforcement and court costs that this bill achieves funneled into increased drug treatment.

Medical Marijuana: This year we also expanded access to marijuana for medical purposes. Marijuana has been shown to be an effective treatment for pain caused by many crippling illnesses. Previous legislation had allowed the use of marijuana for medical reasons but limited such use to academic medical centers, which opted not to participate. [House Bill 881](#) will allow physicians to authorize patients to purchase marijuana from licensed growers and dispensaries, which can better meet patients' needs. I am proud that we took this humanitarian step to help alleviate the suffering of many Marylanders.

Pit Bulls: [House Bill 73](#) addresses issues that grew out of the Court of Appeals' decision in *Tracey v. Solesky* which created strict liability for dog bite cases involving pit bulls. The Solesky ruling drew criticism from dog owners, animal advocacy groups, landlords, and insurers as news reports emerged relating to landlords banning pit bulls and animal shelters receiving an influx of pit bulls. The decision created a number of problems for dog owners, landlords, and insurers.

House Bill 73 provides that if a dog causes the personal injury or death of a person, there is a *rebuttable presumption*, regardless of the breed, that the owner knew or should have known that the dog had vicious or dangerous propensities. A dog owner is able to overcome this presumption by demonstrating that the dog had no vicious tendencies.

"Hybrid" School Board: All members of Baltimore County's School Board are appointed by the Governor. Many parents and other advocates have urged that the

school board selection process be more democratic. [House Bill 1453](#) accomplishes this by providing for direct public input in school board member selection in two ways. Beginning in 2018, the public will elect seven members of the school board by councilmanic district. Four members will still be appointed by the Governor, but a broad-based nominating commission will make recommendations to the Governor for the appointed members.

As chair of the Baltimore County Delegation's Subcommittee on Education, I was happy to support this legislation, which combines two ways to provide public input in the selection of our school board very creatively.

Fairness for All Marylanders: The Fairness for All Marylanders Act, [Senate Bill 212](#), prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation with regard to public accommodations, housing, employment, and commercial leasing. Such discrimination is never acceptable and I supported this legislation, which is very similar to laws that Baltimore County and several other jurisdictions have enacted.

Speed Camera Reform: Controversy over inaccurate speed cameras in Baltimore City and elsewhere led the legislature to add new safeguards and more accountability for the use of speed cameras ([House Bill 929](#)). Jurisdictions that use speed cameras, which can only be set up in work zones and school zones and ticket motorists going more than 11 mph over the speed limit, must have an ombudsman who can void erroneous tickets. The bill also prohibits the "bounty system" under which contractors are paid for each ticket they issue, after current contracts expire.

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I am proud to be representing you in Annapolis and to be a part of the District 11 legislative team, which includes Senator Bobby Zirkin and Delegates Jon Cardin and Dan Morhaim. Please contact me at 410-841-3527 or dana.stein@house.state.md.us if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Dana Stein
Delegate



Paid for by Friends of Dana Stein, Charles Spira, Treasurer

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