

April 12, 2017

Dear Friend,

The 2017 session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded on the 10th of April, and I wanted to send you a note regarding the outcome of some of the issues that might be of interest.

**OPERATING BUDGET:** State aid to Montgomery County for the coming fiscal year will be \$780.5 million with \$689 million, of that amount, directed to our public schools for kindergarten through the twelfth grade. The funding that Montgomery County will receive also includes:

- \$3.1 million for libraries
- \$49.8 million for Montgomery College
- \$4 million for the local health formula
- \$20.5 million for transportation
- \$18 million for public safety
- \$6.5 million for recreation and natural resources

**CAPITAL BUDGET:** Montgomery County received \$55.7 million for much needed school construction which is a significant increase over the previous year. Additionally, Montgomery County received \$88.7 million for the Biomedical Sciences & Engineering Building at the Universities at Shady Grove. In total, Montgomery County will receive \$194.7 million to fund various construction projects in the county.

**LEGISLATION THAT PASSED AND MAY BE OF INTEREST TO YOU:**

**PROHIBITION ON HYDRAULIC FRACTURING:** With passage of this bill, the practice of hydraulic fracturing, better known as "fracking," will be prohibited in Maryland. The controversial practice of fracking requires injecting high pressure water, mixed with many unknown chemicals, to extract natural gas deep in the Marcellus Shale region beneath the earth's surface.

Environmental concerns about fracking include ground water depletion and contamination, including pollution of drinking wells. Additionally, there have been increased numbers of earthquakes in areas where fracking is common place.

**EARNED SICK LEAVE:** The Assembly passed a bill that will require a business with 15 or more employees to earn at least 5 days of paid sick leave per year.

Additionally, the legislature passed bills that: reduce the amount of standardized testing that students are subjected to; increase efforts to combat the opioid addiction crises and requires the state to reimburse Planned Parenthood clinics if the federal government cuts the funding that it currently provides.

Maryland's Attorney General has been granted the authority to bring civil actions against manufacturers of off patent or generic drugs that make an "unconscionable" price increase (an excessive increase unjustified by the cost of producing or distributing the drug).

ON A PERSONAL NOTE...I was pleased with the passage of several bills that I introduced this session.

The following bills were of particular importance to me:

**HB 601 "SENIOR CALL CHECK AND NOTIFICATION SYSTEM":**

Many of our elected officials talk about helping our elderly residents to age in place, however little is done to actually achieve that laudable goal.

This bill will make Maryland the only state to implement an automated statewide system that will provide a daily call, at a time scheduled by the resident, to anyone who is at least 65 years old and chooses to enroll in the program.

The daily call will provide an opportunity for the senior to indicate whether they are well or in need of assistance. If the senior is in need of assistance the system will notify a person of record (friend, neighbor, family member, or a local law enforcement department if it agrees to participate), that the individual is in need of assistance. If the problem requires emergency services, the appropriate rescue service will be notified.

If the senior doesn't answer the call, the system will again call a short time later. If the resident still does not answer, then a call will be made to the person of record to let them know that the senior did not answer the call and that the senior should be checked.

Additionally, the system will be able to notify the people in the program about anticipated dangerous weather (snow storms, hurricanes, etc.), so that they can be prepared with food and medications should they not be able to get out of their home for a few days.

The system will also be able to notify them about the latest scams being perpetrated against our seniors, such as the "IRS scam" where the resident receives a call informing them that the police are coming to arrest them for unpaid taxes. If the person does not want to be arrested, they need to provide a credit card number over the phone to pay the alleged debt. Unfortunately, many of our residents have been taken by this scam, and this notification system will be helpful in stopping the con artists.

Many of our senior residents do not have friends or neighbors or family who routinely check in on them. When put into service, the Senior Call Check and Notification System will provide

them with the comfort of knowing that at least once a day they will receive a call checking on their well-being.

Finally, knowing that many of our seniors are living on fixed incomes, and as such have limited disposable income, there will be no cost to anyone who registers for the program.

#### **HB 1149 "MARYLAND SECURITIES ACT-VULNERABLE ADULTS":**

The con artists and scammers are constantly looking for ways to financially exploit our senior residents and to rip-off their hard earned nest eggs.

This legislation requires that the agents and brokers who deal in stocks, bonds and other securities report to legal authorities any transactions or dealings that seem to be suspicious and that might potentially be the financial exploitation of a senior citizen.

The bill also increases the staff of the Attorney General's Office for the purpose of investigating suspected exploitation.

In past years, I have sponsored successful legislation that required similar mandatory reporting by Maryland's banks and money transmitters (Western Union, MoneyGram), which has resulted in a significant reduction in our senior residents being exploited.

#### **HB 321 "OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL-MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION":**

The Maryland- National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) is a state agency with considerable authority over land use planning and the parks and recreation facilities in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.

The M-NCPPC has a budget of well over \$300 million dollars funded by our taxpayers.

The agency is independent of our county government and does not answer directly to our elected officials. With increasing frequency, I have received requests from constituents seeking greater accountability and transparency with regard to the revenues, expenditures and operations of the M-NCPPC.

With passage of this bill, the position of an independent Inspector General (IG) will be created within the agency. The IG will have the authority to audit all finances of the agency and any of its subcontractors. In addition, the IG will have the authority and power of subpoena to investigate any allegations, deemed appropriate by the IG, of fraud, waste, mismanagement and misconduct.

The public and the M-NCPPC employees will now have an independent person to whom they can report concerns about fraud, waste, mismanagement and misconduct.

**HB 334 "REGULATION OF ANIMALS-KENNEL LICENSES" and HB 781 "RETAIL PET STORES":**

As in past years, I also sponsored successful legislation with regard to the welfare of our companion animals (cats and dogs).

The new laws will require more dog breeders in our state to be licensed and inspected, as well as, increase regulations on pet stores that sell kittens and puppies.

The implementation of these new requirements will help to reduce the number of puppy mills and will limit the puppy mills that can supply kittens and puppies to pet stores in Maryland.

The puppy mill industry is cruel and ugly. The breeding dogs are kept in appalling conditions and suffer greatly. I will continue my efforts, in the future, to fight back against the inhumane treatment of loving companion animals forced to live in misery for purposes of profit.

I am also very honored to have received this year the U.S. Humane Society's Legislator of the Year Award for many years of work on animal welfare issues.

It was a pleasure to work with my District 19 colleagues, Roger Manno, Bonnie Cullison and Marice Morales, again this legislative session. Together we successfully worked to bring funding for needed projects in the district and to advocate for the needs of our community.

It is an honor to represent you, and I will continue to work to provide a quality education for our children, a healthy environment, job opportunities, equality for all of our residents, public safety and to protect and better the lives of our senior residents. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues of interest.

My thanks and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial "B" and a trailing flourish.

State Delegate Ben Kramer