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Health and Government Operations  
Committee



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## THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Dear Friends,

The balloons have dropped and the 2017 Maryland General Assembly session has officially ended. The last 90 days must have set a record for lightning speed! Overall it was a very productive session and good for the residents of Maryland.

I want to thank all of you who contacted me during this session. Please know that while we may not always agree on every issue, I greatly value hearing from you, your input and your feedback. In addition, I am grateful for your civic engagement; hearing from our constituents is the best way to know how policy actually affects those it is meant to help. Thank you for being involved and invested in your government.

There are many areas in which we made good progress. In this letter I hope to highlight just a few of them. To learn more about any of the bills discussed in this letter, or any others, you can go to [Maryland General Assembly 2017 Legislation](#).

### **Budget:**

The budgeting process continues to be focused on making the best use of available resources and raising funds by virtue of economic growth. This year's budget is fiscally responsible at \$42.2 billion in the State Operating Budget and \$4.3 billion Capital Budget, including more than \$1 billion for the Rainy Day Fund, and leaving an additional \$403 million in the General Fund balance. Overall, the budget grew by a fiscally responsible 4.55%, which is lower than the amount recommended in the Spending Affordability process, 4.8%.

The State contribution to Montgomery County's operating budget increased slightly overall (3.6%), but there were reductions in some areas as a result of formulas which take multiple factors into account. Funding for education, libraries and transportation was increased. The decreases came in the areas of community colleges, retirement contributions and health care. In this budget, Montgomery County received \$194,708,698 in capital project funding, an increase over the current year, including projects in schools, higher education, health facilities and environmental infrastructure. The District 19 team – Senator Roger Manno, fellow Delegates Ben Kramer, Maricé Morales and I worked together to secure \$200,000 for capital improvement projects that provide public facilities for our Aspen Hill and Kemp Mill communities.

### **Health Care**

In my first session as chair of the Insurance Subcommittee of the Health and Government Operations (HGO) Committee, I was able to work on bills that will address the effects of changes to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The biggest concern is that any decrease or reconfiguration of funding (such as block grants) will automatically decrease our ability to provide health care to over 300,000 Marylanders. We passed **HB 909/SB 571** that establishes a Commission, including legislators and representatives of insurers, hospitals, physicians, behavioral social workers and consumers, to address changes as they are made and to consider the impact on the overall comprehensive health care program in the state. We also added additional insurance coverage for the materials needed in the treatment of diabetes and for 3-D

mammography, which has been found to be more effective than regular X-ray scans.

Pharmaceuticals were a huge topic covered in this session.

One bill (**HB 631/SB 415**) defines price gouging in the sale of generic drugs and sets up a process for the Maryland Attorney General to address it. A number of bills were passed that will make it more convenient to obtain medications; beginning in 2019, if the customer wishes, pharmacists will be able to synchronize refills of maintenance medications (**HB 1147/SB 868**), so a person can pick them all up in one trip to the drug store and pharmacists will be permitted to dispense contraceptives without a prescription (**HB 613/SB 363**). **HB 54** allows individuals the right to try experimental drugs under certain circumstances and when nothing else has worked. Maryland has had a growing problem with opioid addictions and every year we are losing thousands of our residents to overdoses. This session workgroups were charged with identifying comprehensive approaches to addressing this issue. The Start Talking Maryland Act (**HB 1082/SB 1060**) was designed to increase public outreach and education. It requires the State school board to coordinate with local health departments on a prevention program and provides \$3 million in grants for public service announcements and training for school health personnel. Public colleges and universities are also required to have overdose-reversing drugs available for campus police and implement an education and prevention program for incoming students. The Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act of 2017 (**HB 1329/SB 967**) provides for increased funding for behavioral health community providers who regularly deal with addiction issues and expands grants for drug court programs and a statewide toll-free crisis hotline. It also requires the State Health Department to establish crisis treatment centers across the State and that hospitals to establish a protocol for addressing overdose patients.

A major victory this year was the passage of **HB 1/SB 230**, the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act. This law will allow over 693,000 Marylanders to earn up to 5 days of sick leave each year. Earned sick leave will be paid in businesses with 15 or more employees, and unpaid in smaller businesses, but with no negative consequences. It exempts seasonal businesses and employers who already offer these benefits. These folks will no longer have to make an impossible choice: go to work sick or send an ill child to school, or stay home and sacrifice much needed income and maybe their employment.

## **Education**

In 2016, the Federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to replace the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The earlier bill relied heavily on standardized test scores to evaluate school performance and resulted in limiting instruction to what could be tested on multiple-choice tests. Under that law, learning did not show improvement and students, teachers and parents raised concerns about the inordinate amount of time devoted to simply testing students. ESSA puts the responsibility on states to identify the performance measures to assess learning and to make recommendations for improvement. The Protect Our Schools Act (**HB 978/SB 871**) establishes the standards for performance, which includes the use of testing results up to 65%, examination of other factors such as class size, educator certification levels, availability of higher level courses and school climate, which all contribute to student learning. The State Board of Education will have discretion on the implementation details. It also requires the State to consider all options to address school performance concerns and prevents an immediate jump to privatization. As a complement to this act, the Less Testing, More Learning Act (**HB 461/SB 452**) requires the State Board of Education to limit the amount of time for Federal, State and local assessments for each grade to 2% of instructional hours, in order to give more time for instruction, and especially instruction that is more creative and performance based. Each school district will set up a committee to monitor the assessment programs for value with respect to time.

## Environment

This session, we made good, bipartisan, progress on protecting our environment. After years of study, we finally banned the practice of hydraulic fracturing, “fracking”, to obtain natural gas from underground in the State with the passage of **HB 1325/SB 740**. It has been found to damage the environment and to have negative health consequences for neighbors. Our focus now should be on the generation of more clean energy. We took the first step by overriding the Governor’s veto of The Clean Energy Act 2016, which increased our renewable energy standards to 25% by 2020, and will ultimately create thousands of jobs in the wind and solar energy programs. In addition we protected our oyster sanctuaries from harvesting for five more years with the passage of **HB 924**. This bill gives these natural animal filters for the Bay time to grow and sets up scientific analysis for regulating the harvesting of oysters.

## Bonnie’s Bills

I had the opportunity to work on bills in a variety of areas this year and I was successful on 5 of them. **HB 221/SB 223** puts the Maryland Council on the Advancement of School-Based Health Centers under the Department of Health in order to assure that all aspects of the public health network are considered as the Council determines how to best incorporate the services of these clinics into the network and better serve the families. **HB 789** was created to address the sustainability of condo and homeowners associations, and common ownership communities, by making it easier to update their governing documents to meet current needs. Soon biological medicines that can be interchanged with the expensive name-brand products will be available. Maryland will be ready with the passage of **HB 1273/SB 997**, which will permit pharmacists to substitute these medicines unless the physician requires otherwise. Passage of **HB 482/SB 385** updates the standards of practice for nurses. **HB 725** allows the family of a dentist, who passes away unexpectedly without having planned for their practice, to own and maintain the practice for a year in order to have time to find alternatives for patients and the staff.

**HB 1214/SB 1013** would have set up the licensure for a dental therapist, a mid-level dentist practitioner. It did not pass, but the discussions identified a problem of access to dentists, especially for low income, aging and individuals with disabilities; advocates have agreed to work with me over the interim to determine the best options to create a comprehensive network for dental care.

There were 1660 bills submitted by Delegates this year, 1200 by Senators. While many of them were cross-filed bills, it is fair to say that over 2000 different bills were heard in the 2017 session of the General Assembly. To see what happened to other bills you were interested in, please check out the MGA website at the link above. If you have any questions about process or opportunities, or ideas for future bills, please do not hesitate to contact my office, [bonnie.cullison@house.state.md.us](mailto:bonnie.cullison@house.state.md.us), or 301-858-3883.

Thank you again for your engagement. I wish you and your family all the best over the next nine months. The 2018 Legislative Session begins on January 10, 2018 and it will be here soon enough ☺.

All the best,

  
Delegate Bonnie Cullison