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Subject: News from the 2016 Legislative Session in Annapolis
Date: May 6, 2016 8:10:21 PM EDT
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Delegate Talmadge Branch House Majority Whip

2016 Legislative Session Report



***Delegate Talmadge Branch
45th Legislative District
Baltimore City***

Dear Friend,

As the 2016 Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly ends, I feel honored to have served the constituents of the 45th Legislative District. Your emails, phone calls and letters, kept me abreast of the issues you care about, and helped me to make informed decisions and represent you well in the Maryland General Assembly.

While this was a challenging session, I worked hard to ensure the City of Baltimore benefitted. The budget includes funding for education, housing, school construction, and money for capital projects at Morgan and Coppin State universities.

Additional investments were allocated to East Baltimore with funding for the development of a new International Black Fire Fighters Museum, the East Baltimore Historical Library, Clifton Park and Eager Street Park.

More Important Legislative Initiatives of the 2016 Session

Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (HB 580)

The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act would allow workers, at businesses with 15 or more employees, to earn 1 hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked. Employees would be allowed to accrue up to 7 days (or 56 hours) per year. It also provides that an employer must provide additional unpaid sick and safe leave under certain circumstances. The bill passed out of the House of Delegates, but did not pass out of the Senate. This legislation will be revisited next session.

Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (HB 1003)

On average in Maryland, women earn 85.5 cents for every dollar a man earns, and this pay gap increases when the woman is a minority. This legislation expands the Equal Pay for Equal Work law and prohibits discrimination based on gender identity, protects employees who inquire into the wages of other employees from retribution, and requires employers to offer equal opportunities for job training and promotions. This legislation goes into effect October 1, 2016.

The session began after a summer of protests and unrests in the City of Baltimore. Therefore, public safety, police accountability, and criminal justice reform were major topics of discussion. Legislation was introduced in these areas with two critical bills passing -- legislation that adopts the recommendations of the Public Safety and Policing Workgroup and the Justice Reinvestment Act. The Justice Reinvestment Act will help to reduce Maryland's prison population, and the Workgroup recommendations will reform police practices and improve police accountability.

Also, economic stability for the middle class was a top priority, from the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act to the College Affordability Act of 2016.

I have enjoyed working on your behalf for the past 90 days and I look forward to spending more time in the District as I transition back to the District office. Please do not hesitate to call my office if I can be of any assistance to you. Again, thank you for the privilege of being able to serve you in the Maryland General Assembly.

Sincerely,
Delegate Talmadge Branch
Majority Whip

This publication outlines some of the highlights from the 2016 session. More information about the session can be found at the Maryland General Assembly website at <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov>.

Voting Rights-Ex-Felons (Veto Override)

At the beginning of the 2016 Legislative Session, the House and Senate voted by 2/3 majority to override six of the Governor's vetoes from 2015. One of the most notable bills was HB 980. Before this bill was passed, an individual was prohibited from registering to vote until the completion of his or her term of parole and probation for a felony conviction.

Equal Pay Commission-- Establishment (HB 1004)

This bill creates a Maryland Pay Equity Commission to: evaluate the extent of wage disparities based on race, sex and gender identity; develop a comprehensive strategy to promote pay equality; establish a method of collecting pay equity data from employers; and develop partnerships with private and public sector entities to promote pay equity. This bill takes effect June 1, 2016.

College Affordability Act of 2016 (HB 1014)

In response to the rising costs of college tuition, this bill was proposed to make early college savings more accessible for middle-class families. This bill establishes a matching State contribution for eligible college savings accounts; creates a refundable tax credit of up to \$5,000 for undergraduate student loan debt; alters authorized uses of, and clarifies eligibility criteria for, specified student financial aid; and establishes conditions under which students with unpaid balances may continue to attend public institutions of higher education. The bill goes into effect July 1, 2016.

Over 40,000 Marylanders were not able to vote for their elected representatives in public office. HB 980 establishes that once a person is released from incarceration, he or she is eligible to register to vote. With the passage of this bill, Maryland joins 13 states and the District of Columbia to allow individuals to vote immediately upon their release from prison.

Capital Budget

School Construction

The budget included \$280 million for school construction. The House added an additional \$51 million. In total, the capital budget provides Maryland with \$330.8 million for school construction. The school construction budget leverages \$400 million in local investments.

Higher Education

The budget included \$420 million for higher education in his budget, including \$75.4 million for Historically Black Colleges. The House added:

- An additional \$5 million for Shady Grove (\$36.5 million total);
- \$4.7 million for Morgan State Student Services Building;
- Pre-authorized funds for the Coppin State School of Business.

Other Funding

Also, the Capital Budget included funding for the following initiatives: \$442 million for environmental initiatives; \$68 million for health and human services, including \$27.5 million for the new Prince George's Hospital; \$120 million for housing, with an additional \$2.5 million for Rental Housing Works (\$12.5 million total); and \$15 million for local legislative initiatives.

Study of Student Loan Refinancing in Maryland (HB 1015)

This bill creates a study on options for public programs to help with student refinancing of college loans. The study includes a review of possible entities in the State that have and do not have bonding authority and currently have the capability and the capacity to offer a student loan refinancing program. This bill goes into effect June 1, 2016.

Next Generation Scholars of Maryland Program (HB 1403)

HB 1403 expands eligibility to 7th and 8th grade students for the Guaranteed Access Grant program. This Grant provides college scholarships to students who meet a rigorous academic and social criteria through middle and high school. The bill further establishes the Next Generation Scholars Program that provides funding to targeted school systems to guide these same students through their college education.

- This \$5 million program must provide these students with access to summer work or internship opportunities,

East Baltimore Projects

The 45th Legislative District sponsored legislation to create the **International Black Fire Fighters Museum and Education Center**. The purpose of the Museum is to provide education in fire safety and prevention, and will be the only one of its kind on the east coast. The Museum will be located in a vacant firehouse in the Oliver community. The state's Capital Budget includes \$250,000 for the acquisition, planning, design, construction, expansion, repair, restoration, renovation, reconstruction, and capital equipping of the Museum.

Also, funding of \$250,000 was included in the budget for the development of the **East Baltimore Historical Library (EBHL)**. The EBHL will focus on the history of African Americans in East Baltimore, within the broader context in which African Americans came to live in the neighborhood and the social forces that shaped the wider community. The Historical Library will be housed on the campus of a new school being built as part of the New East Baltimore project.

Other projects include funding for a grant of \$500,000 for the development of **Clifton Park**, \$300,000 for **Frank C. Bocek Park**, and \$4 million to **Eager Street Park** in FY 2017.

Operating Budget

Maryland continues to be an excellent steward of taxpayer money -- one of nine states with a triple-A bond rating. Maryland has maintained this rating for over 50 years. This budget fully

financial aid literacy, mentorship and career readiness. Additionally, the Program requires a unique intensive summer bridge program for high school seniors who directly enter college.

- The program is available in Baltimore City and in other school systems in which at least 50% of the students are eligible to receive a free lunch under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the 2015-2016 school year. The program takes effect July 1, 2016.

Consumer Protection - Asset Recovery for Exploited Seniors Act (HB 718)

This bill authorizes the Division of Consumer Protection in the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to bring a civil action for damages against a person who violates the State's prohibitions on exploitation of a vulnerable adult on behalf of a victim of the offense or, if the victim is deceased, the victim's estate. The division may recover damages for property loss or damage. If the division prevails in an action brought under the bill's provisions, the division may

funds K-12 education at \$6.3 billion dollars. The budget includes an additional \$19 million for five school systems, including Baltimore, with declining enrollment, as well as \$19 million for nine counties that need additional support for teacher pension funding. The budget caps college tuition increases at 2%. Healthcare funding increases by 4.4% across the State, including increases for providers of developmental disability programs. This is the third year in a row that a budget was passed with no new tax increases.

The Public Safety and Policing Workgroup (HB 1016)

At the request of the Workgroup on Public Safety and Policing, this bill was proposed to reform police practices and improve police accountability in the State of Maryland. This bill goes into effect October 1, 2016. The following outlines the legislation:

Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission

- * Replaces the Police Training Commission with an independent Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission.
- * Requires entrance-level police and in-service level police to study the application of antidiscrimination and use of force de-escalation training.
- * Develops standards for a mandatory psychological evaluation of a law enforcement officer periodically, or if an officer who has been involved in a traumatic incident or has returned from combat deployment.

recover the costs of the action for the use of OAG. This authorization is in addition to any other action authorized under law. A conviction for the criminal offense is not a prerequisite for maintenance of an action under the bill. The bill takes effect July 1, 2016, and applies prospectively to causes of action arising on or after that date.

Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund (HB 686)

This bill codifies the Strategic Demolition Program that provides State funding to local governments that provide a local funding match. Grants and loans are provided to government agencies and community development organizations for revitalization projects in any area designated as a "sustainable community." The bill directs \$21.5 million for FY 2017 and codifies a MOU with the City of Baltimore on a targeted demolition and revitalization partnership. HB 686 takes effect July 1, 2016.

Baltimore Regional Neighborhood Initiative Program (HB 684)

HB 684 extends the successful grant program with an annual appropriation of \$12 million that provides flexible funding to community development corporations in designated and underserved communities to implement neighborhood revitalization strategies. This

Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights

- * Changes the complaint process to allow a complaint to come from an individual with firsthand knowledge obtained who has a video recording of the incident.
- * Requires the individual who files to sign the complaint under the penalty of perjury.

Whistleblower Protections

- * Prohibits a supervisor from threatening or taking a retaliatory action against a law enforcement officer who discloses information or seeks to remedy under the bill's provisions or any other law or policy governing the law enforcement agency.

Community Law Enforcement Fund

- * Establishes that a Community Law Enforcement Fund of \$500,000 must be included in the annual budget bill to fund local community law enforcement programs.

Justice Reinvestment Act (SB 1005)

The Justice Reinvestment Act, a comprehensive justice reform package, focuses on prison beds for serious and violent offenders by reducing penalties for drug possession offenses and diverting offenders with substance abuse disorders into treatment. The Act addresses inefficiencies in parole and better prepares inmates to return to society by ensuring every inmate has a recidivism reduction case plan. The bill also expands eligibility for geriatric parole (from age 65 to 60) and makes necessary improvements to our medical parole program. The legislation establishes more effective supervision practices, and includes key sustainability measures, ensuring that these reforms are effective and stay effective for the long-term. This legislation was requested by the Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council. Most of the bill's provisions take effect October 1, 2017.

Noah's Law (SB 945)

legislation takes effect July 1, 2016.

Enoch Pratt Free Library (HB 1401)

HB 1401 provides funding for expanded access to public libraries for students, residents and visitors and bolsters the libraries' role as anchors of the community. This bill creates a \$3 million State grant to be matched by the City of Baltimore (80/20) to fund the increased operating expenses for targeted library branches. It is the General Assembly's intent that libraries in underserved communities are prioritized. This bill takes effect October 1, 2016.

Early Voting Centers (HB 1008)

This bill expands early voting sites in a proportional manner statewide for the 2018 elections and beyond. This legislation goes into effect January 1, 2017.

Health Insurance - Contraceptive Equity Act (HB 1005)

This bill prohibits insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations (collectively known as carriers) from applying most copayment or coinsurance requirements for a prescription contraceptive drug or device that is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Carriers, as well as Medicaid and the Maryland Children's

In December of 2015, Montgomery County Police Officer Noah Leotta was critically injured after he was struck by a drunk driver. After Officer Leotta was taken off life support, news surfaced that the driver of the vehicle had previously been arrested twice for driving under the influence of alcohol. Named after Police Officer Noah Leotta, SB 945 forces anyone convicted of the following offenses to get an Ignition Interlock System:

- DUI/DWI
- Suspended license for refusing to take, or failing, a blood or breath test;
- Revoked license for a conviction of homicide by a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol; and,
- Convicted of reckless or negligent driving and who was originally charged with an alcohol motor vehicle offense.

This legislation takes effect October 1, 2016.

Weapon-Free Higher Education Zones (HB 1002)

In November of 2015, Washington College shut down for two weeks when an armed and mentally-distraught student went missing. The student ended up taking his own life and drawing attention to the need to keep guns and other weapons off of college campuses.

HB 1002 makes it illegal for a person, other than a police or security officer, to possess a gun on public college campuses. This bill passed in the House and did not pass in the Senate. This bill will resurface again next year.

Health Program (MCHP) must provide coverage for a single dispensing of a six month supply of prescription contraceptives. This bill takes effect January 1, 2018.

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