



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

2021 End of Session Letter

The 2021 Maryland General Assembly (MGA) was strange in its operational implementation and spectacular in its legislative impact. With social distancing protocols in the Senate and three locations in the House, in-person floor sessions were held. Committee hearings were via Zoom meetings and all sessions were live streamed. Despite these challenges, the legislative results are landmark, ground-breaking, and meaningful.

Summary of Legislative Priorities

COVID-19 Response and Relief:

COVID-19 impacted low-income families the hardest with Maryland being one of the slowest states nationally to get unemployment insurance payments to claimants. The MGA passed the bipartisan Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act that provides over \$1.5 billion in pandemic relief. The RELIEF Act infuses the State's economy with \$509.0 million and over \$1.0 billion in tax relief and credits. Several bills reform Maryland's unemployment insurance (UI) system with immediate and structural fixes to modernize and streamline the UI system. HB 907/SB 817 require a study of unemployment insurance reforms. HB 1002 makes process improvements by expanding language and disability access, establishing greater customer service standards, providing more accountability within the appeals process and requiring more information about denials and over-payments. HB 908/SB 816 implements flexible payment plans for employers to pay their unemployment taxes. HB 1139/SB 819 raises the amount of weekly income an unemployment insurance claimant can earn throughout the duration of an emergency which allows more workers to seek part-time work and supplement their UI benefits. HB 1143/SB 771, Work Share Expansion Act of 2021 makes Maryland's workshare program consistent with federal law allowing more Maryland employers to retain employees and facilitate employees getting back to work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

VETO Overrides of 2020 Bills:

The MGA sought to override many of the Governor's vetoes of 2020 passed legislation. Some key bills now enrolled into law are HB 1, Funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to settle a decade-long lawsuit; HB 86, Maryland Metro/Transit Funding Act; SB 684, Correctional Prerelease Unit and Service facility for incarcerated Women; SB 669/HB 1095, Prescription Drug Affordability Board and fund; SB 398, Small Business Innovation Research and Technology Transfer Incentive Program; and HB 1300, Blueprint for Maryland's Future to implement recommendations from the Kirwan Commission on K-12 education reform. These are some of many critical legislation needed for our communities to thrive.

Economic Opportunities:

Speaker Adrienne Jones championed several bills to address disparities in economic access and opportunities. These bills include HB 1178 which creates a tax-free savings accounts for all first-

time homebuyers to promote and prepare a path to homeownership. HB 1210 requires Maryland companies to report their racial diversity on Boards, Executive Leadership and Mission in order to qualify for State capital funding, tax credits or certain dollar value of contracts. HB 1211 adds \$10 million to TEDCO's Builder's Fund to provide more meaningful venture capital opportunities for minority entrepreneurs. HB 1213 prevents housing loan and credit applicants from being denied if applicants can provide alternate forms of creditworthiness. By increasing credit access, an equal path to homeownership will be afforded for more Marylanders. SB 66, the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 creates a plan for all state residents to have access to high-quality, affordable broadband Internet service. HB 581, the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act requires employers to provide additional benefits and protections to essential workers during this pandemic and future health emergencies.

Health Equity and Access:

HB 28/SB 5 requires health equity and bias training as part of the accreditation and licensing process for all health care providers including registered doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners. HB 78/SB 52, The Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Act establishes the Maryland Commission on Health Equity to create a health equity framework in order to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities in Maryland. HB 463/SB 172 designates Health Equity Resource Communities in order to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, improve access to primary care, promote primary and secondary prevention services and reduce health care costs and hospital admissions and readmissions. HB 849 lowers the maximum fees that can be charged for a copy of a medical record and prevents health care providers from charging a separate preparation fee. Removing these financial barriers benefit our most vulnerable residents. HB 812/SB 719, Thomas Bloom Raskin Act establishes a mental health services phone call program.

Judiciary and Public Safety:

Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021 incorporates several pivotal bills to restore community trust and gain greater insights into law enforcement policy and procedures. HB 670 overhauls the police disciplinary process and makes Maryland the first state in the nation to fully repeal the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights and replaces it with a civilian-driven, public-facing approach to police discipline. SB 71 requires all local and state law enforcement officers to wear body cameras by 2025; and limits the use of force by law enforcement. SB 178 provides the public with access to police disciplinary records. SB 600 requires an independent investigative unit in the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to investigate alleged or potential police-involved deaths of civilians. Several criminal justice reform bills include SB 202 which takes the Governor out of parole decisions for inmates with life with parole sentences who have been imprisoned a minimum of 15 years and recommended for parole by the Maryland Parole Commission. Maryland will now join the majority of states that follow this model. SB 494 allows for reconsideration of life sentences without parole for juvenile offenders who have been imprisoned for at least 20 years. HB 742, the Walter Lomax Act provides compensation for individuals who are erroneously convicted, sentenced and jailed to provide restitution and resources for reentry back into society.

Housing Relief:

HB 18, an historic bill grants tenants a right to counsel in specific eviction cases. With this legislation, individuals who make 50% or less of the state median income are eligible for a lawyer to argue defenses in eviction cases, especially for retaliatory actions, rent escrow

disputes, and lead hazards. 96% of landlords have legal representation as opposed to only 1% of tenants. To incentivize landlords and tenants to resolve disputes outside of court, HB 31 increases the fee to file for an eviction from \$15 to \$75 (\$85 in Baltimore City).

Higher Education:

Several bills provide much needed support and advances for higher education institutions including SB 746/HB 894 which allows for collective bargaining for community colleges. SB 433 ensures funding to community colleges is equitably and fully funded. This bill provides \$7 million to the School of Medicine for doctors in specialty areas for better healthcare delivery at University of Maryland Capital Region Hospital and University of Maryland rural hospitals. SB 767 establishes a Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to address student hunger and lack of food for college students. SB 779/HB 1238 makes alterations to the Maryland 529 Program.

Environment and Energy

The effects of climate change, environmental injustice, and clean energy alternatives were prominent issues for this session. HB 30 creates a climate counsel advocacy position to champion climate change issues to the Public Service Commission, as Maryland advances our greenhouse and gas reduction goals. HB 507 increases the allocation from the Bay Restoration Fund Wastewater Account from about \$10 million up to \$20 million for more agricultural projects, storm water projects, and green infrastructure initiatives in disadvantaged communities. HB 517 expands the clean energy loan program to fund water efficiency projects, environmental remediation projects, and resiliency projects. HB 298 requires consideration of climate impacts for electric power plans; evaluation of effects of greenhouse gas emissions; and maintenance of fair and stable labor standards for workers in associated industries. HB 1207 alters membership on the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities to reflect the diversity of the State; requires community-based listening sessions in different geographic locations and greater accessibility of meetings.

Election Law:

Several election laws passed this session. HB 156/SB 283 facilitates voter registration and voting for college students and military members overseas. HB 745 modernizes Maryland's formula for Early Voting centers which will add over a dozen new centers across the state for the 2022 election. SB 596 modifies the hours for Early Voting centers to be consistent with hours of operation on Election Day for both Primary and General Elections. HB 1048 creates a permanent mail-in ballot option to make voting easier and more convenient. Marylanders who want to vote by mail in future elections will not need to request a ballot for every election. These are all important steps toward a more accessible and equitable democracy.

Women and Children:

HB 771/SB 548 requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in coordination with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), to include *at least* five questions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to enable health providers, school officials, and communities to combat and mitigate long-term impacts of ACEs on children. HB 711 allows a State maximum income tax reduction of \$1,000 for donations made to a diaper bank or a charitable entity registered with the Comptroller. HB 401/SB 438 requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop policy guidelines to support educational and parenting goals for pregnant and parenting students. HB 944/SB 711 establishes the Growing

Family Child Care Opportunities Pilot Program which provides grants to educate and provide technical support with becoming a registered family child care provider. Child care providers are an important part of Maryland's workforce with approximately 79% of Maryland children having parents who work outside the home. This workforce was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Women Legislators of Maryland heard first-hand from a panel of child care advocates about issues impacting these workers. Also, the Women's Caucus held an "In Memoriam" program to recognize Maryland child care providers who died from COVID-19. You may watch the live stream of these events on YouTube at - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbp498emQV49YS6dRqDbnFQ>.

Budget:

After facing a billion dollar deficit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FY22 budget eliminates the structural deficit for the next two years, restores the Rainy Day Fund, and leaves a cash balance to account for unforeseen impacts from COVID-19. The Operating Budget fully funds healthcare and education funding while putting \$1.5 billion into construction projects to get people back to work. The Capital Budget leverages over \$2 billion in state capital spending with prioritizing education, recreation and support for local jurisdictions. The Capital Budget dedicates \$2.2 billion to school construction with an extra \$320 million to build schools, modernize classrooms and provide equipment so schools can safely re-open. State and local parks will receive \$130 million to maintain parks and playgrounds. The Capital Budget approves a record 275 bond initiatives, totaling over \$75 million to stimulate local investments. District 14 obtained funding for the Burtonsville parking garage, Friends House Retirement Community, Dolores R. Miller Park, Olney Satellite Police Station, Town of Brookeville road improvements, Damascus Recreational Park, and Sandy Spring Museum. Last year at the ballot box, voters overwhelmingly supported a constitutional amendment to allow sports betting in Maryland. HB 940 makes Maryland the 21st state in the nation to legalize sports betting, increases funding for education and maximizes the opportunity for minority businesses to participate in Maryland's newly established gaming industry.

Delegate Scholarship:

I provide scholarships to applicants residing in District 14 with preference given to community-minded students who attend Maryland colleges and universities. Current high school seniors, full-time or part-time degree-seeking undergraduate or graduate students may apply. For more details, please visit my website at <https://www.pamelaqueen.com/scholarship> and email the application materials to pam.queen@house.state.md.us by June 30, 2021. No late applications are accepted.

It has been my pleasure to serve you this 2021 legislative session and advance monumental legislation in Maryland. A special thanks to my staff, Alex, Aimee, and Jacob. I look forward to hearing your suggestions on how I and my colleagues can make the Maryland we all love, better!

Sincerely,

