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Montgomery County

Economic Matters Committee



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April 9, 2003

Dear Friend:

Thank you for contacting my office during the 2003 legislative session, my first year as a delegate. The views expressed by constituents like you were essential to my ability to ask pointed questions, engage in debate in an informed way, and educate my colleagues. Your input also helped me prioritize what issues to pursue and invest time in to better serve District 15. Although I tried to respond to most of the comments I received, I was unable to respond to all of them. Please know that your concerns and suggestions provided me with valuable insight.

The bulk of the time of most legislators, including myself, is spent listening to testimony during committee hearings. I serve on the Economic Matters Committee, a 23-member committee with jurisdiction over a wide array of subject areas including Economic Development, Banking, Public Utilities, Energy, Corporate Law, Business Regulation, Telecommunication, Insurance and numerous other issues. I am one of only two Montgomery County delegates on the Committee. I also serve on the Montgomery County Delegation's Transportation Committee, which deals with local transportation related legislation that requires approval by the State Legislature.

My learning curve has been steep during this initial year but I believe I've made several positive contributions that will benefit our State. I introduced House Bill 549 which successfully passed both the House and Senate and is likely to be signed by the Governor. This legislation will enable Maryland corporations to utilize Internet technology to facilitate communication with stockholders and board members. The new law will, among other things, make Maryland more attractive to corporations considering locating in our State.

In addition, I cosponsored almost 50 other pieces of legislation covering a broad range of issues. Among the more noteworthy bills were those related to clean energy which would have made our State less dependent on foreign energy sources while also protecting our environment, a bill to stiffen the penalty for drunk driving, bills protecting animal rights, and a bill to maintain the assault weapons ban.

On the budget front, the Session was a particularly difficult one for the General Assembly as there were many obstacles to overcome in reaching a consensus between the House and the Senate. With the national economy facing a recession and with the heightened costs associated with homeland security, Maryland, like most other states, is faced with the prospect of severe shortfalls for the coming years. After considerable debate, the Senate and House came together to pass a balanced budget for next year. Many cuts to important programs had to be made and concessions and compromises were reached with regard to healthcare, transportation, and many other much needed services. Clearly, raising taxes and/or cutting spending for essential programs and services is very difficult but in order to maintain the quality of life we have come to expect in Maryland, and within the parameters set by the Governor, the General Assembly was forced to make some very difficult decisions.

With respect to video lottery terminals, i.e. slots, an issue that dominated the Session, I voted with the House to pass House Bill 800, which establishes a commission to study gambling in Maryland, so that the members of the House and Senate will at least have a thorough understanding of the impact that slots and other forms of gambling potentially have on the residents and businesses of Maryland. In my view, the slots bill presented by the Governor was incomplete, it left numerous questions unanswered, and included terms that were not desirable for our State from a business standpoint. Even if it had passed, the resulting revenues would not have resolved the State's structural budget deficit. The Governor may introduce a bill next year to legalize slots in our State and I look forward to benefiting from the findings of the study authorized by House Bill 800 in order to make the most informed decision possible regarding this extremely important policy matter.

One very unfortunate consequence of this year's budget crisis was the impact on Higher Education funding. One of Maryland's greatest strengths is the number of residents that hold higher education degrees. I strongly believe that the cuts made to the Higher Education budget this year can potentially weaken our economy in the long-term. However, the Appropriations Committee was faced with a series of difficult decisions, with Governor Ehrlich threatening to veto many revenue proposals that would alleviate some of the financial woes of the State. In the end, the Senate and House reached a compromise budget that only cuts \$5 million from Higher Education spending, as opposed to the over \$30 million originally proposed. Unfortunately, if Governor Ehrlich vetoes any of the revenue enhancement bills passed by the House and Senate, he may cut more money from critical programs including Higher Education.

I am happy to report that we did win several battles saving University programs such as tuition remission for staff, which, if eliminated, could have potentially crippled the University system's ability to compete with other state and private universities for qualified and top-notch professors, staff, and graduate students. I spent many long hours working to secure support to save this program. Unless Governor Ehrlich overrides the General Assembly's decision, it appears the program has been taken off the chopping block. It is my hope that in the coming years we can restore much, if not all, of the funding removed from the University system.

I look forward to hearing from you in the future and I hope that you will come to one of the town meetings the District 15 delegation plans to hold in May where we can get a chance to talk in person. Otherwise, please continue to write, email and phone throughout the interim with issues of interest to you. Your insights on important legislative issues and community concerns are very important to me. Also, if there is any way I can be of service to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for all of your support during my freshman year in the Maryland House of Delegates.

Sincerely,

Brian Feldman