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Economic Matters Committee



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Dear Friend:

I received many messages from constituents during the Legislative Session and I value the insight they provide. Although I try to answer all the messages, the volume of e-mail, phone messages and letters often makes it difficult to respond to all of them. However, the opinions expressed by my constituents are essential to my ability to ask pertinent questions, argue key points, and educate my colleagues. Please know that your concerns and suggestions provided me with valuable insight. I am taking this opportunity to brief you on some of the highlights of the 2006 Session.

The legislature passed a balanced **\$29.4 billion budget** for FY 2007. The budget increases education spending by 11.4% to \$4.5 billion. In addition, the budget freezes tuition at state universities, funds stem cell research, and increases the Rainy Day fund to protect Maryland's AAA bond rating. Maryland is one of only six states with a AAA bond rating. Montgomery County will receive increased operating funding over last year, including \$341 million for education, \$48 million for transportation and \$16 million for public safety.

The legislature approved a capital budget that provides **\$40 million for school construction** in Montgomery County, money sorely needed to address our schools' overcrowding problems. Working with my colleagues from District 15, we obtained funds for several important capital projects in our District, including: \$150,000 for construction of a **Poolesville Town Hall**; \$150,000 to restore an historic barn at the **King Farm Dairy MOOseum**; \$250,000 for the **Germantown Life Sciences Incubator**; \$170,000 to upgrade facilities at the **Ivymount School** for children with developmental disabilities; \$50,000 to purchase equipment for the **BlackRock Center for the Arts**; and \$50,000 to renovate and expand the **Agriculture and Activity Center**, which offers learning programs and houses various County agricultural agency offices.

In 2005, I introduced and gained passage of the ***Maryland Biotechnology Investment Incentive Act***. During the 2006 Session, ensuring that the program maintained sufficient funding was a high priority for me. I fought to secure \$6 million for the program in the budget and then successfully argued against efforts to reduce that amount on the House floor. This \$6 million funding level is essential to attracting sorely needed capital for our early-stage biotech companies and keeping Maryland a leader in this vital industry.

On the legislative front, I was able to gain passage of several key bills that I introduced and to influence several other significant pieces of legislation that passed the General Assembly.

Responding to the accelerating rate of condominium conversions, I introduced and gained passage of **HB 123 Real Property - Condominiums - Conversion of Rental Facilities**. The new law will extend certain rental protections—currently provided to seniors and the physically handicapped—to developmentally disabled individuals during a condo conversion. This measure will help these people hold onto their homes.

I introduced a bill with Delegate Lou Simmons to address a growing problem that costs Maryland millions of dollars each year—businesses that fail to purchase workers' compensation insurance as required by law. An injured employee of an uninsured business is paid from the Uninsured Employers Fund, a fund every law-abiding business pays into. The citizens that pay are subsidizing those who do not. Under **HB 1035 Uninsured Employers' Fund - Liability of Corporate Officers**, the State will be able to pursue civil claims against individual corporate officers who knowingly fail to purchase the insurance, allowing the State to recoup the cost of the uninsured employees' claims. This measure will help reduce workers' comp insurance costs and will serve as a deterrent to those contemplating not buying the insurance.

In the post-Enron era, strong oversight of the accounting profession is imperative. My bill, **HB 103 State Board of Public Accountancy Fund**, earmarks CPA licensing fees to go directly to the State Board of Accountancy. This legislation will provide the Board with the necessary resources to provide important services for the profession, and investigate consumer complaints. With only two full-time employees to oversee the State's 18,500 CPAs, our Board currently has the lowest staff-licensee ratio in the nation.

I also introduced and gained passage of a trio of bills to streamline provisions of the **Maryland insurance code** dealing with notices, premium increases and cancellations. **HB 570, HB 760 and HB 956** will resolve the inconsistent, conflicting patchwork of provisions that this part of the law had evolved into over several decades through repeated amendments and additions.

An important piece of legislation that I worked on in my committee, the House Economic Matters Committee, was **HB 189 The Healthy Air Act**, a bill I cosponsored. The bill failed in the committee in 2005 but I was able to offer a key amendment that helped secure its passage this year. This legislation addresses long-overdue upgrades to Maryland's coal-fired power plants, including the Dickerson plant located in District 15. The bill limits emission of nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and mercury in Maryland, where asthma is at epidemic proportions.

Several other bills that I cosponsored also passed the General Assembly. One such piece of legislation will improve **pension benefits for teachers**. Once signed into law, the bill will increase benefits so that pensioners will receive 54% of their salary after 30 years of employment (up from the current 38% level). The so-called multiplier is increased from 1.4% to 1.8% and member contributions will go from 2% to 5%. Strengthening our teachers' pension system will help Maryland retain good teachers and is critical to keeping our K-12 public education system amongst the nation's best.

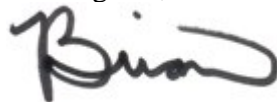
The **Agricultural Stewardship Act, HB 2**, landmark legislation that helps reduce runoff pollution, develops young farmers, and encourages funding for agricultural-based businesses is another bill I cosponsored that passed the legislature.

In addition, I voted to pass **SB 22, the Retired Military and Senior Citizen Tax Reduction Act of 2006**, which successfully passed both chambers of the legislature on the last day of Session. This legislation will provide state tax relief to retired veterans.

Finally, the legislators representing District 15 responded quickly to an announced pending closure of the **MARC train stations** in Boyds and Dickerson by filing emergency legislation, **HB 756**. As a direct result of this move, the Department of Transportation decided to keep the stations open for at least one year in order to gather additional information and to create a citizens advisory board for MARC.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for your input and your support through the year.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.