



Dear Friend,

The 2019 Session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded on April 8th. The following is a summary of several important topics and initiatives that may interest you. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us.

Beginning with the introduction of Governor Hogan's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Budget in January, discussions in the Legislature during the 90-day Session focused on preserving crucial funding for priority areas such as education and economic development while not raising taxes. The \$46.6 billion balanced Budget was fully vetted and approved by the General Assembly. In a display of bipartisanship, the FY 2020 Budget passed the Senate unanimously (47-0) and by a wide margin in the House of Delegates. We were able to fund our priorities and pass a balanced budget without increasing the burden on Maryland's taxpayers. The General Fund will maintain an over \$118 million balance and the Rainy Day fund will contain \$1.2 billion, important to have in reserve should we experience an economic downturn in the near future.

Maryland has also retained its coveted AAA bond rating, one of only **twelve** states in the Nation to hold the rating from all three rating agencies - S&P Global Ratings (formerly Standard and Poor's), Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings. The AAA bond rating is essential to keeping our State's borrowing costs low, which allows the State to finance a wide range of critical capital improvements.

One of Maryland's greatest achievements is its public education system. I am proud of Maryland's designation from *Education Week*, the Nation's leading education newspaper, which ranks Maryland's public schools **5th** in the Nation. This distinction is a direct result of the significant investment the State has made in K-12 education over the last decade. State support for K-12 schools in FY 2020 exceeds \$7 billion for public schools. Direct aid to local school systems will increase an estimated \$435.2 million (7.5%). State support for Maryland's public four year colleges and universities will grow by \$110.7 million (7.3%), allowing in-state undergraduate tuition rates to increase a modest 2%. These investments will make higher education in Maryland more affordable and accessible.

Looking toward the future of education in Maryland, in 2016 the Maryland General Assembly established the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (known as the Kirwan Commission) and tasked them to review and recommend

changes to education funding formulas and to make policy recommendations that would enable Maryland's pre K-12 system to perform at the level of the best-performing systems in the world. The Commission presented their findings to the General Assembly this year and the Legislature included \$255 million in the Budget to initiate funding for full-day kindergarten, establish a College Career Readiness program and other resources for non-native English speakers, children with disabilities and those from low-income households. This investment in our children's future is an investment in the future of Maryland and I am confident that these new programs will serve to raise Maryland's national educational standing.

Maryland remains committed to providing vital healthcare services to its residents. Medicaid funding in FY 2020 will total \$11.2 billion, allowing 1.4 million Marylanders to receive the coverage they need. The Budget also includes \$800 million to address the growing opioid crisis. Allocations for these funds will be directed toward treatment and detox.

Feldman Bills

This Session was highly productive from both a legislative perspective and in my new role as **Vice Chair of the Senate Finance Committee**. I was the **lead sponsor** for **16 bills** that gained passage and are on tap to be signed into law by Governor Hogan (click [here](#) to see a list of 2019 Feldman bills). Additionally, as Vice Chair, I had the opportunity to preside over bill hearings in the Finance Committee and play a key role in shaping the outcome of numerous important bills in our Committee such as increasing the minimum wage and creating the Nation's first Prescription Drug Affordability Board.

Below I have summarized four of my most impactful bills that will have long ranging effect in the areas of healthcare, climate change and furloughed Federal workers.

Healthcare

In an effort to stabilize and reduce premiums in the individual healthcare market following the repeal of the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate, I sponsored and gained passage of **two** essential healthcare bills.

Maryland's Easy Enrollment Health Program passed the Legislature with strong bipartisan support. It establishes a first-in-the-Nation program that provides uninsured Marylanders with easy access to health insurance coverage by simply checking a box on their State income tax return. Approximately 50,000 uninsured Marylanders currently qualify for Medicaid but are not enrolled. Those who qualify for Medicaid will be automatically enrolled if they chose to **opt-in**. The Maryland Health Exchange will also be able to contact another 170,000 uninsured Marylanders who qualify for Federal premium tax credits and advise them how they can purchase private coverage for no additional cost beyond the Federal tax credits or for a modest additional amount after applying those credits.

The **Individual Market Stabilization** bill also passed the Legislature and builds upon bipartisan legislation enacted last year creating a State reinsurance program which stabilized and reduced health insurance premiums in the Maryland individual health insurance market. It extends funding for the reinsurance program through 2023 which will continue to help keep premiums in the market under control.

Fighting Climate Change While Also Boosting Our Economy

Progressive leadership and innovative solutions are needed to combat complex problems presented by climate change. I sponsored and gained passage of **The Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act**, one of the most important bills passed during the 2019 Session. This bill mandates that Maryland utilities get 50% of their power from renewable energy sources by 2030. It will target solar and offshore wind sources and it is projected to create an estimated 20,000 new solar jobs and 5,500 new wind jobs in Maryland. In addition to helping catalyze Maryland's clean energy industry, this bill will help to safeguard the diverse ecosystems of Maryland, protect the health of our children and demonstrate our State's leadership on a global environmental issue.

Federal Government Shutdown Assistance

In response to the extended shutdown of the Federal government earlier this year which impacted our region more than any other in the Country, I sponsored the **Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act** which provides that "essential" civilian Federal employees, forced to work without pay while furloughed but currently ineligible for unemployment benefits, will be eligible for either unemployment benefits or interest-free loans (which must be paid back to Maryland if they receive retroactive pay from the Feds). All furloughed Federal workers deserve the same short term benefits and financial security during a shutdown and I am pleased to announce that this bill was the **first** to be signed into law by Governor Hogan this Session.

2019 Bills

Prescription Drugs

As Vice Chair of the Senate Finance Committee and Chair of the Conference Committee assigned to resolve differences between the House and the Senate on the bill, I helped shepherd the **Prescription Drug Affordability Board** bill through the Legislature for approval. This bill creates the Nation's first Prescription Drug Affordability Board and requires the Board to conduct a thorough review of the entire drug supply and pricing chain and then recommend detailed strategies and State policies to reduce prescription drug costs in Maryland.

Minimum Wage

The minimum wage bill, nicknamed the **"Fight for Fifteen"**, passed, after an override of the Governor's veto. Following extensive testimony before the Senate Finance

Committee from workers, business owners and constituents from across the State, my fellow legislators and I agreed to a gradual increase in the statewide minimum wage, eventually reaching \$15 by 2025 for most businesses and by July 1, 2026 for small businesses with fewer than fifteen employees.

Guns

As a member of the Executive Nominations Committee, I participated in a review of the role of Maryland's civilian Handgun Permit Review Board (Board). It was brought to the Committee's attention that the Board, which considered appeals of Maryland State Police decisions to deny or limit permits to carry handguns, had made a practice of routinely overturning the State Police's decisions in overwhelmingly large numbers (over 80%). In response to this information, the General Assembly passed legislation to abolish the Maryland Handgun Review Board. Under the bill, the appeals will now be conducted by a State administrative judge, as opposed to a Board of citizens who may not be qualified to make these determinations or may have political agendas.

Montgomery County

The FY 2020 Budget increases funding to local governments and Montgomery County is slated to receive over \$883 million in direct aid, a solid 8.8% increase over FY 2019. Additionally, Montgomery County has been allocated more than \$57.1 million for public school construction and \$6.5 million for higher education facilities.

Bond Initiatives/Capital Projects

In collaboration with my District 15 colleagues, Delegates Kathleen Dumais, David Fraser-Hidalgo and Lily Qi, I am pleased to announce that we have secured capital funding for four worthy projects in our area.

- **Black Hills Regional Park** encompasses 2,000 acres of land for outdoor recreation in Boyds. In conjunction with the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission, this bond initiative will fund a SEED (Sustainable Education Every Day) classroom to support the approximately 45,000 students and visitors who access the Black Hill Nature Programs annually. The SEED classroom will be a sustainable, net-zero energy, net-zero water, non-toxic, modular learning space. Naturalist staff will be able to incorporate STEM curriculum into programming based on the functions of the classroom.
- **BlackRock Center for the Arts** is the leading cultural, visual and performing arts center in upper Montgomery County. This bond initiative will be used for capital improvements to its aging infrastructure. In particular, the monies will be used to replace carpet, furniture, curtains and stage and dance floors.
- Last year, the Legislature passed the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018. Funding for security upgrades for all nonpublic special education schools was inadvertently excluded from the bill. **Ivymount School**, located in Potomac, is one of those nonpublic special education schools serving 200

students with developmental disabilities. In an effort to bring the school into compliance with the Maryland Safe to Learn Act, this bond initiative will fund required security that the school identified when they completed a comprehensive security assessment in July, 2018.

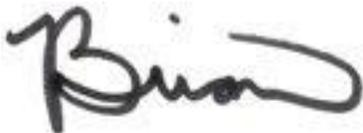
- Lastly, the District 15 Team was successful in obtaining \$1 million in funding for a **custom wine crush and teaching facility in Poolesville**. In partnership with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority, entrepreneurs interested in the wine industry will be able to lease small parcels of land to start their businesses. And, in conjunction with the University of Maryland and the Universities at Shady Grove, the facility will support educational opportunities to study viticulture and enology science, hospitality, marketing and culinary arts - creating opportunities for students across the State.

D15 Town Hall Session Wrap-up

Finally, please join me and Delegates Dumais, Fraser-Hidalgo and Qi for a Legislative Town Hall on **Sunday, April 28th** from **2-4 PM** at the Germantown Community Recreation Center, 18905 Kingsview Road in Germantown. We look forward to speaking with you and discussing the 2019 Session in more depth.

As always, I value your feedback and encourage you to contact me if you have any questions or comments at Brian.Feldman@senate.state.md.us or call the office at 301-858-3169. You can also follow me on Facebook and Twitter.

Sincerely,



By Authority: Citizens for Brian Feldman, Elaine Garson, Treasurer