



2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION CONCLUDES

CONTENTS

1. Greetings

2. FY2026 Operating Budget

**3. Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee**

4. Education

5. Energy

6. Environment

**7. District 15 Capital Project
Improvements**



Dear Friend,

The 2025 legislative session officially ended on April 7th, and I can attest to the fact that these past 90 days have been more challenging than any of my previous sessions representing my friends and neighbors in District 15. The current situation has been severely exacerbated by the devastating actions being taken by the federal government under the new Presidential Administration. Those of us in the Maryland General Assembly are committed to doing everything within our power to mitigate the actions at the federal level.

With so many federal employees, contractors, and agencies within Maryland, we are particularly vulnerable to adverse federal action. Although Maryland remains one of only 14 states to still maintain a coveted AAA bond rating as determined by S&P Global Ratings, Moody's Investor Service, and Fitch Ratings, several weeks ago, Moody's Rating stated that: Maryland ranks at or near the top for risk from changing federal priorities and policies, by metrics as diverse as share of federal government employment, scientific research grant funding and federal contract awards.

Amidst the backdrop of uncertainty that reigns in Washington, DC, the members of the Maryland General Assembly worked hard to address the concerns Marylanders face and fulfill our constitutional duty to pass a balanced budget that funds our shared priorities and ensures essential services, improves our State's financial condition moving forward, while also making significant cuts to ensure we remain fiscally responsible.

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET

When the 2025 session began, the State was facing a projected \$3 billion deficit in FY26. The reasons for this shortfall are multifaceted. One factor that contributed to the deficit is the cost of existing programs, such as Medicaid and the Maryland Child Care Scholarship Program, has increased significantly. This issue is not unique to Maryland, as the cost of healthcare and childcare has been rising nationwide. Additionally, we have not completely recovered from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the State is experiencing static employment and population growth.

Despite these challenges, the General Assembly did what was necessary to meet our balanced budget requirements, while also reserving a cash surplus of \$317 million and maintaining \$2.1 billion in our State's Rainy Day Fund to offset and protect against federal action negatively impacting Marylanders. Additionally, the budget ensures that 94% of Marylanders will not see an increase in their income taxes or will see a tax reduction. There is also **no increase in the State's sales tax on goods, no property tax increases, no estate tax increase, and no increase in the gas tax.**

It is never easy to cut vital programs, but we preserved funding for critical initiatives upon which some of our most vulnerable Marylanders rely. We have maintained our commitment to Maryland's public education system by ensuring the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint), the program passed by the legislature in 2021 to transform our public schools into a world-class educational system, remains fully funded. Additionally, direct aide to our local school systems will increase by 7.3%. Understanding the importance of health care coverage, \$15.6 billion is appropriated to Maryland Medicaid, providing coverage to about 1.5 million residents. The Budget also generates \$500 million in new revenue for transportation infrastructure and transit projects across Maryland. The State's Capital Budget also includes tens of millions of dollars for Montgomery County school construction and several local District 15 projects described below.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE



I continue to serve as **Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee (EEE)**, one of only four standing committees in the Senate, with jurisdiction over not just the topics in the committee title, but also cybersecurity, information technology, data centers, housing, election, local government, ethics, and more. My colleagues and I worked diligently – collaborating with community leaders, advocates, subject-area experts, and fellow legislators – in order to address pivotal issues that fall under the Committee’s jurisdiction. After conducting public hearings on over 540 bills, the most bills heard by any committee in the General Assembly, EEE was able to pass meaningful legislation on a myriad of topics. Please take a moment to review a few of the key bills that successfully moved through the Committee and passed the General Assembly.

EDUCATION

As the Trump Administration attempts to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education, guaranteeing that Maryland's students have access to quality education remains a top priority. The Blueprint is in its third year of implementation and prioritizes scholastic achievement throughout all grade levels. The Blueprint will guide Maryland toward a stronger, more equitable public education system, grounded in its five foundational pillars: Early Childhood Education, High-Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders, College and Career Readiness, Resources for Student Success, and Governance and Accountability.

This session, Governor Moore proposed some deliberative changes to the Blueprint through the introduction of **The Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**. This administrative bill was heard in both the Budget and Taxation Committee and the EEE Committee. Budget and Taxation worked through the financial aspects of the bill while EEE took up the policy adjustments that were proposed. The final product is the result of many of hours of collective work and compromise between both Committees and the House of Delegates. I am pleased that it maintains strong support for community schools and enhances teacher recruitment through multiple programs - a National Teacher Recruitment Campaign, a Maryland Teacher Relocation Grant Program, the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact and the Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program. It also establishes the Academic Excellence Program to improve teacher retention and student learning by hiring coaches to help teachers improve their instructional practice. It will pause the important Collaborative Time Program for four years to allow time to address financial constraints and workforce shortages that could impact the Program's successful implementation. Additionally, it requires a study of Special Education funding.

The reforms made to the Blueprint will help to strategically position the State's school systems to effectively move forward with the long-term goals of the Blueprint, ensuring transformative progress in Maryland's education system

ENERGY



In an effort to continue on the path to advancing our clean and renewable energy goals, while also maintaining reliability, and ensuring affordability, EEE passed three critical energy bills.

The Next Generation Energy Act establishes an expedited procurement process and incentives for new nuclear, natural gas, and other dispatchable energy generation (generation that can be used by the grid as needed) to help Maryland achieve its energy priorities and provide much-needed rate relief.

Among the bill's provisions is a major increase in the deployment of energy storage (150 megawatts of distribution-connected energy storage) and adjustments to the energy rate-making process. Without additional in-state energy generation, Maryland will be forced to rely on out-of-state energy like coal and oil, and the deployment of costly transmission lines to transport energy to Maryland. Currently, Maryland imports 40% of our energy from out-of-state. The Next Generation Energy Act sets limitations on natural gas plants in Maryland by capping the amount of energy and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions allowed. Additionally, gas plants must plan to convert to hydrogen or zero-emission biofuel when the technology becomes available. The bill also adds restrictions on large load customers like data centers, requiring them to pay upfront costs associated with their energy needs to ensure that ratepayers do not bear this burden. The bill also makes certain that infrastructure upgrade costs borne by ratepayers prioritize safety and provide value to customers. The goal of these changes is to have a rate-making system that better serves Maryland customers, not energy providers. Finally, the legislation provides a rate-payer credit for relief on their energy bills from the high cost of energy that many experienced this past winter.

In conjunction with The Next Generation Energy Act, it is imperative that we continue to expand renewable energy generation in Maryland. However, Maryland is ranked as one of the most challenging states in the nation for siting and permitting for projects like solar and battery

storage due to regulatory uncertainty. This Session, I was the lead sponsor of The Renewable Energy Certainty Act, which streamlines the regulatory process to build new solar and energy storage projects in the State. While working through the bill with stakeholders, it became apparent to me that guardrails were needed to also protect the State's agricultural resources. To achieve this, the bill establishes a solar cap, limiting the percentage of land that can be used for solar projects in county-designated priority preservation agricultural areas to 5%. Once that limit is met, the State relinquishes the remaining 95% of its current state preemption authority to approve any additional solar projects in those designated areas, the strictest provision of its kind in the nation. The legislation also establishes siting standards for solar generating stations and battery storage projects such as landscape buffers, and regulations for the grading and removal of any topsoil to maintain the land's integrity to make sure it can be converted back to its original condition at any time. Additionally, community notification and meetings are required to solicit community feedback. By standardizing the permitting and regulatory process for solar and energy storage projects, the goal is to expand clean, solar energy production and energy storage projects while preserving agricultural land in the State.

Finally, to secure reliable and sustainable future for energy generation, The Energy Resource Adequacy and Planning Act establishes the Integrated Resource Planning Office to consider Maryland's prospective energy needs by developing a long-term comprehensive forecast. This includes analyzing resource adequacy, wholesale market scenarios, reliability risks, modeling, and cost-effective solutions to meet our energy demands as well as our clean energy goals.

During my tenure as your State Senator in the Maryland General Assembly, I have consistently advocated for climate change solutions and transitioning the State to clean, renewable energy. I will continue to work with my colleagues to develop policies to strengthen the reliability of the grid and reduce GHG emissions in Maryland while being mindful at all times of the impacts of these policies on Maryland ratepayers.

ENVIRONMENT



Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act, an initiative led by Governor Moore, establishes the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program to incentivize farmers to adopt environmental conservation practices. It also supports regenerative agricultural practices under the Maryland Healthy Soils Program to enhance the land and ecosystem by improving soil health. Additionally, it sets up a Water Quality Monitoring Program to provide a consistent statewide approach for improving water quality monitoring. The legislation also supports oyster aquaculture and streamlines the review process for aquaculture leases.

In 2022, with the passage of the Climate Solutions Now Act, the State accelerated our GHG emissions goals by setting targets to reduce GHG emissions by 60% by 2031 and net-zero GHG emissions by 2045. One of the strategies to meet these goals was to require the Maryland Department of the Environment to develop **Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS)** for large buildings that are 35,000 square feet or more and are commercial or multifamily residential. This year, the EEE Committee made alterations to BEPS, which allow some exemptions to specific buildings such as hospitals due to their role providing essential services and for counties who have already established their own BEPS program, including Montgomery

County, to be able to operate under their own rules even if they may be in conflict with the State's program.

In a continuing effort to reduce waste, expand recycling, and promote reuse, the EEE Committee passed legislation that requires manufacturers of packaging and paper products sold in Maryland to take responsibility for their products after consumers have used them by establishing an **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Program**. This innovative and forward thinking policy will establish a framework for producers of packaging and paper products to create and implement a producer responsibility plan that includes performance goals for recycling, composting, reuse, waste reduction, and postconsumer recycled content. The Maryland Department of the Environment will oversee the program and track compliance.

DISTRICT 15 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

In partnership with my District 15 colleagues, Delegates Linda Foley, David Fraser-Hidalgo, and Lily Qi, I am pleased to report this Session that we secured funding for nine projects in our community.

- **Blackrock Center for the Arts**
 - Opened in 2002, the Blackrock Center for the Arts is a leading performing and visual arts venue in Montgomery County offering shows, gallery exhibitions, community events, and arts education. Funding will be used to maintain the Center, which include indoor and outdoor facilities.
- **Dream Catcher Meadows**
 - Dream Catcher Meadows is a green-care animal sanctuary operated by 7th Generation Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit that aims to promote awareness about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and to develop programs for people with neurodiverse conditions. The farm provides safe and inclusive programs for children, adolescents, and young adults with neurodiverse conditions. Funding will be used to build a pole barn for the animals with a solar array to power the entire farm.
- **Ivymount School**
 - Serving over 200 children and young adults with developmental disabilities, Ivymount School has received funding to make necessary upgrades to the aging Montgomery County School building used to serve the students.

- **Katherine Thomas School**
 - The Katherine Thomas School (KTS) has provided education to children with language and learning disabilities, autism, intellectual disabilities, and to those with other health impairments since its establishment in 1995. The State funding secured will be used to construct a playground and community space accessible to KTS students to engage in activities that will strengthen their physical and social-emotional skills.

- **Madison Fields**
 - Since its founding in 2008, the Madison House Autism Foundation (MHAF) has served adults with autism and their families to improve their health and wellbeing. MHAF currently operates Madison Fields, an expansive 400-acre farm that connects individuals with programs such as agricultural outreach, therapeutic riding, and health and wellness activities. Funding secured will enable MHAF to promote energy efficiency in their facilities.

- **Riverworks Art Center**
 - Offering art classes, performances, and cultural programs, Riverworks Art Center is currently renovating the Old Methodist Church historic property into a state-of-the-art performance center and gallery space. State funding will be used for the renovation

- **Sugarland Ethno History Project**
 - The Sugarland Ethno-History Project, Inc was established to preserve the history of the African American community of Sugarland in Montgomery County, founded by former enslaved people. Funds will be used for infrastructure repairs in the Sugarland Chapel, which is used as a museum to educate the public on the rich history of the site.

- **Western Montgomery County Pool Bubble**
 - The Western Montgomery County Pool Bubble Project will update the existing pool deck and install a pool bubble for year-round use. This expanded access will provide more recreational opportunities for the community as well as promote local tourism.

- **White's Ferry**
 - The District 15 team has been working for several years with local leaders to find a pathway to re-open White's Ferry and resume its operations since it closed in 2020. We have procured \$1.5 million in state funds this session dedicated to this goal.

As always, thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you in Annapolis. I value your feedback and encourage you to contact me with any questions or comments at brian.feldman@senate.state.md.us.

Sincerely,

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, sweeping underline.