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Legislative District 2A
Washington County

ASSISTANT MINORITY WHIP

Judiciary Committee

Juvenile Law Subcommittee

Chair

Washington County House Delegation



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April 18, 2017

Dear Friend,

Thank you for visiting my website and reading about the 2017 General Assembly Session. Governor Larry Hogan indicated that, "It is, by far, the best session we've ever had, We got more accomplished in the last 90 days than we did in the last two [sessions] added together. I'm not sure it could have been more successful."

In the 2017 General Assembly it is true that many good bills passed and that many bad bills were stopped. For me personally, this was a busy session as I introduced and worked on 20 common-sense bills, the most I have ever done. While I do not place value on simply "getting bills passed," I work hard in Annapolis to make positive changes that will help the families in our state.

I want to thank you again for contacting me this year. Your input regarding specific legislation is vital as I research bills that come before me for votes. Your involvement is the mechanism that keeps government in check. Alexander Hamilton said that, "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself." For our system of government, citizen involvement is key to preserving our freedom, and I appreciate your role.

What follows is a summary of key pieces of legislation that were introduced and acted on during the 2017, 437th session of the Maryland General Assembly. This session 2,861 bills were introduced and 935 bills passed both houses. For the bills I introduced, four bills passed, two bills resulted in positive changes my without needing to be enacted, and one of my bills was incorporated into another bill that was passed in a bi-partisan effort. Other bills I put forward were not going to pass, but needed to be introduced to start or continue the conversation toward making long-lasting positive changes that will help Marylanders, like the need for real redistricting reform.

I hope you enjoy this summary, and if you have any thoughts or suggestions for next year, please let me know. As you read the bills, please note that the starred bills (*) are bills that I introduced. You can learn more about those bills and other bills that I introduced on this website where you can find PowerPoint presentations that provide greater detail regarding many of my bills.

It is an honor to serve you in the Maryland General Assembly. If you have any questions, thoughts for next year, or if I can be of service to you in the future, please contact me by email at neil.parrott@house.state.md.us or by phone at (301)660-4263.

Sincerely,


Neil C. Parrott
Maryland House of Delegates, District 2A

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3. HB 1442 – Safe Package Delivery Act*

KEY:

“*” denotes a *Delegate Neil Parrott Bill*; more details provided online at <http://delegateneilparrott.org/legislation/>
“(ONLINE ONLY)” please visit <http://delegateneilparrott.org> to see the full write-up that is longer than 8 pages.



TAXES AND FEES:

SB 597/HB100 Hometown Heroes Act – This bipartisan effort to provide tax relief to First Responders and Emergency Personnel was passed UNANIMOUSLY out of both houses. Our “Thank You” for the tireless and often dangerous work done by First Responders and Emergency Personnel will exempt the first \$15,000 of retirement income for First Responders and Emergency Personnel who are at least 55 years old from Maryland taxes. In the future, I would like to see this applied to all Maryland retirees, but am glad we can start here.

HB 53 - Sales and Use Tax - Exemption - Firearm Safety Device*



Several states in both red and blue states have passed legislation to provide a sales tax exemption for firearm safety devices. These devices include firearm safes, lock boxes, trigger and barrel locks, or other devices designed to protect and safely secure firearms.

In an effort to help increase gun safety and provide a common-sense sales tax break in Maryland, I introduced a bill that would provide this tax break in Maryland. While the bill did not pass this year, we did have a good discussion with the Ways and Means Committee discussing how this bill would be helpful and have planted the seeds for a bill to be passed in the future.

BUDGET ISSUES:

Maryland’s Fiscal Year 2018 Operating Budget

Last year, for the first time since I began serving as a Delegate, I voted for the Operating Budget. That budget didn’t include any tax hikes, was balanced, and didn’t rely on gimmicks. Unfortunately, that’s not the case this year.

This year, unlike last year, we had to rely on a separate bill called the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) to move money around to “balance” the budget. With the introduction of a BRFA, allocated money is no longer plain to see and money can be traded to categories where it doesn’t belong through fund transfers, revenues, and reductions. This is a shell-game, but unfortunately one that had to be played this year since 83% of the General Fund Budget is mandated spending by law. The General Assembly has passed laws mandating certain spending and then changes those spending requirements in the BRFA. These legally-mandated spending laws trap our Governor into funding specific items at minimum rates, leaving only 17% that he actually can propose to spend on the rest of the budget that desperately needs funding. Maryland deserves better, and I did not vote in favor of this Budget.

Operating Budget

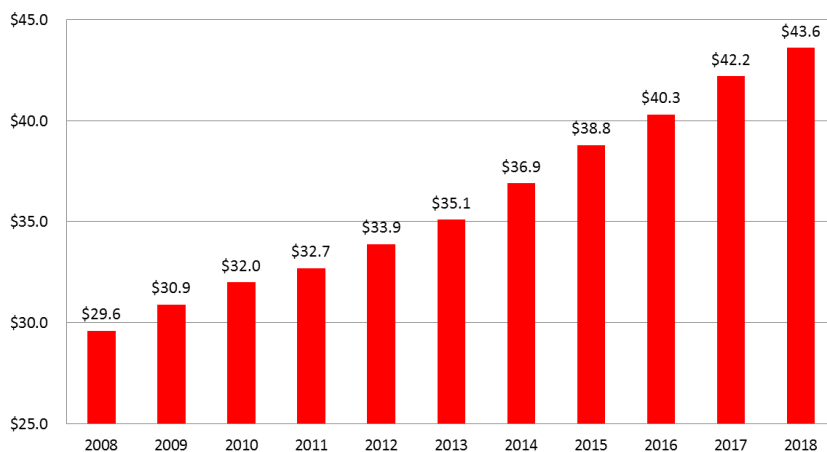
Unfortunately, after the General Assembly’s actions, the overall budget growth was 1.63% over last year’s approved budget. This created a \$1.4 Billion increase in spending. The chart on the right shows the drastic increase in spending since 2008.

In order to reverse the significant tax increases or to provide meaningful tax reductions and to help businesses to come to Maryland, this rate of spending increase needs to be reduced.

The Tax Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan think tank ranks Maryland as #42 when it comes to business friendliness. Only 8 states rank lower than Maryland, and none of them are our neighbors. In order to bring more jobs to Maryland and to help more Maryland families move from welfare to work, we need to improve the business environment to our state. The way to start this is painfully simple. Stop spending and borrowing so much money each year.

Maryland's Total Spending - Operating Budget
(In Billions)

Source: Department of Legislative Services

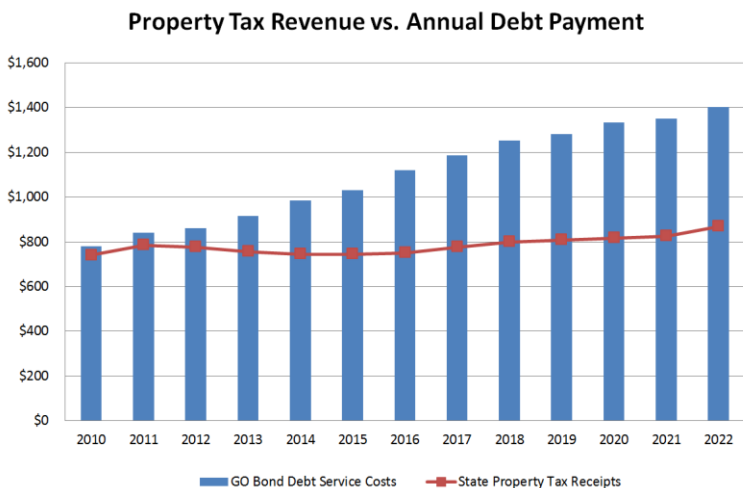


Capital (Debt) Budget

Did you know that this year, Maryland owes almost \$53 Billion, and that each Maryland citizen currently owes \$8,799 according to the Maryland Debt Clock? Last year, it was \$47.69 Billion and \$7,947 for each of us...

Thankfully, Governor Hogan submitted a Capital Budget that would have borrowed less than \$1 Billion for the first time since the Ehrlich Administration. In fact, the Governor capped borrowing at \$995 Million in fiscal 2018. As submitted, two-thirds of the Governor's Capital Budget was dedicated to education projects with dollars also dedicated to revitalization, economic development, and tourism projects across the state.

Unfortunately, the General Assembly didn't use the same restraint and increased the borrowing to \$1.065 Billion. To put this in perspective, in Governor O'Malley's last year, Fiscal Year 2015, Maryland borrowed \$1.18 Billion in new debt. Governor Hogan and the General Assembly reduced the borrowing so that in Fiscal Year 2016 Maryland borrowed \$1.045 Billion, and for Fiscal Year 2017 the Capital Budget only borrowed \$1.005 Billion. By action of the legislature, this year's borrowing will be the highest since Governor O'Malley's budget. The Governor can line item veto from the capital budget, so hopefully we will see a few lines vetoed so that the actual Capital Budget returns to under \$1 Billion, or less, of new debt.



While Maryland's capital budgets borrow less than in Governor O'Malley's tenure, **Maryland must stop borrowing so much money.** Maryland's property tax is supposed to be the primary agent used to pay for the principle and interest payment on the state debt, but the funds collected from property taxes don't come close to the yearly principle and interest payments. In order for the property taxes to actually cover the cost of debt payments, Legislative Services indicated that Maryland would have to forego all new debt for the next 7-8 years, and then we would be able to pay the minimum payments from our property taxes.

Since the property tax cannot pay the debt service, each year the General Fund makes up the difference.

In fiscal year 2018, Maryland is projected to receive

almost \$800 Million from property taxes but is required to pay over \$1.2 Billion in debt service, a difference of over \$400 Million that has to come out of the General Fund. The amount depleting the General Fund to pay the debt keeps increasing, and with continued spending, it is only a matter of time until the state will have to significantly increase our property taxes to pay the debt service.

While not in Governor Hogan's original proposal, the General Assembly also funded pet projects known as bond bills, but more appropriately called debt bills. This year's projects include many projects that should be funded at the local level, if they were to be funded at all. Included in the list is \$75,000 for a Coal Miner Memorial Statue, \$100,000 for Downs Park Amphitheater, \$2 Million for the Baltimore Museum of Art, and \$100,00 for Believe in Tomorrow Cottage By the Sea. These projects sound very nice, but should the state be borrowing money debt to fund them? Borrowing money that we do not have and cannot pay for with the property taxes to pay for local projects like these just doesn't make sense.

In many ways, what we do in the Capital Budget is like using our children's credit cards. We run up debt in their names, reap the benefit of all the projects, and then we leave the responsibility of paying to future generations. This is not responsible government, and I voted against this irresponsible bill.

HB 978 - Shielding Failing Schools

This bill has two main parts. It dictates factors and percentages that must be used to evaluate schools making it much more difficult for a school to be a failing school. It also protects failing schools and school boards from any state-funded competition. The bill indicates that, "After a 3-year period...that if student outcomes have not improved...and intervention is necessary, the Department shall collaborate with the county board in determining the appropriate intervention strategy subject to existing collective bargaining agreements between the county board and the exclusive bargaining representative."

The bill goes on to specify that the State Board may not use public funds to help these students by utilizing private schools, charter schools, state run schools, or even contracting with a for-profit company for help within the failing school. Rather than give students real hope like we have seen be successful all across the nation, this bill traps students without providing any alternatives or allowing any kind of competition. Instead of actually helping the situation, the bill even indicates that a failing school could create a school-year calendar beyond 180 days to trap kids in the failing school for an even longer period of time.

This bill was passed, vetoed by Governor Hogan, and then had the veto overridden all within the 2017 session. The General Assembly rules state that if a bill is passed early enough in the session, the bill has to be acted on by the Governor in time for the legislature to still be able to override the veto in the same session.

The Democrat Leadership suspected that this harmful bill would likely be vetoed, so they moved to pass it early. After the legislature overrode the Governor's veto, Jenese Jones, interim executive director for MarylandCAN, said that, "I am deeply saddened by the Democratic-controlled Assembly's hasty move to keep HB 978, a bill that will now widen Maryland's achievement gap and severely dilute our ability to give schools, teachers and families the insight into student performance they so deserve...."

Unfortunately, HB 978, weakens accountability standards and creates barriers, making it harder for the state to intervene in failing schools. Both the Washington Post and Baltimore Sun Editorial boards have come out against the bill, with the Sun saying, "We agree with Mr. Hogan that it represents more direct meddling by the General Assembly into the state school board's business than is wise."

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed by President Obama in 2015, the State Board of Education must devise a new accountability system for school performance. While I don't support ESSA and would prefer keeping control of schools at the local level, HB 978 ties the hands of the State Board and dictates how it will devise this system. By passing this bill, Maryland could be risking \$248 million per year in Federal Education Money if these low accountability standards are found to be out of compliance with federal standards.

The bill bars the State Board of Education from emphasizing student achievement when it establishes this accountability system. It limits the measures of actual school effectiveness, such as student achievement and graduation rates, to only 65% of a school's accountability rating. The bill instead favors factors such as teacher satisfaction, small class sizes, low teacher-to-student ratios, and a "healthy and supportive school culture." Such a low accountability rating makes it much more difficult to identify the schools that are actually failing Maryland students. Not only that, but with this bill's passage, Maryland will have the weakest accountability system in the entire country.

The most troubling aspect of this bill is that it traps children in failing schools. With HB 978, students will be trapped in failing schools for three years before the State and local school districts are permitted to intervene. The pattern of forcing children to languish in failing schools year after year, while the powerful teachers union works to protect bad schools by putting up smoke screens like HB 978, hurts children and harms our society. I voted against this bill.

SOCIAL:

SB 354/HB 370 – "End-of-Life Options" - Euthanasia/Doctor-Assisted Suicide Bill

The good news is that the Senate version of the Bill was withdrawn and the bill was stopped. A contentious hearing in the House Joint Hearing Room continued to demonstrate significant opposition to the Bill which helped prompt the dismissal of the bill this year. This is our third year hearing the bill, which has remained unchanged from previous

versions, except for the name. I believe this is a dangerous bill for Maryland citizens and was thankful to see it stopped in the State Senate.

My objection to the bill is that we should be focusing on how we can better care for those in pain, and to help ease their pain – not by killing them or assisting their suicide, but by the use of cutting-edge medical and palliative options. Supporters of this bill concentrate on the understandable desire to be compassionate and caring towards those at the end of their lives, especially those who are enduring significant pain or disfigurement. However, the cost is too high. Beyond the cost of the actual life, it also poses a significant risk to our most vulnerable populations: the disadvantaged, the disabled, those suffering from mental disease or depression, and the elderly.

This is a very slippery slope that we would be wise to avoid. This bill allows a 3rd party to decide who would be allowed to use doctor assisted suicide. Could patients be encouraged to commit this type of suicide in order to save time, to save money? What is a terminal illness? Does deep depression count? How about a physical limitation that seems hopeless? This is one of the most concerning bills for me, and I will continue to fight against this bill.

MARYLAND MARIJUANA UPDATE

HB 1443/SB 999 – Expand by Seven, Medical Cannabis Grower Licenses and add MBE Quotas

HB 1259/SB 1038 – Expand by Two, Medical Cannabis Grower Licenses

In a dramatic end to the 2017 Legislative session in the House of Delegates, HB 1443 was introduced for a final vote with 8 minutes until the end, Sine Die, at midnight. The bill was a combination of the expansion by two or seven medical cannabis grower licenses, where quotas would be granted for Minority Businesses.

The bill had just come from the State Senate, and House members were being asked to vote on a bill we had not read and could not read with only 8 minutes left in the general session. The bill would have the effect of delaying the implementation of medical marijuana in Maryland, a good thing from my point of view. It would also have added the number of growers who would likely later push to legalize recreational marijuana in Maryland, a bad thing in my view.

The votes were all counted, and the bill would pass even without reading it, except for the time that was left. I, and many of my Republican colleagues, asked for details about the bill and began discussion when debate was cut short by a call to “Move the previous question.” Right away I stood with many others and asked for a roll call vote to cut off debate. The roll call vote to stop debate was passing and was one vote short of passing the bill itself. Starting with the Minority Leader, we began to “explain our votes” on ending the roll call. By the rules, we each have two minutes to explain our votes and with that time, debate ended, and the bill failed when the clock struck midnight.

Now there is a call for a special session just to pass this bill or one like it. I don’t believe we need more marijuana growers in Maryland. Also, the decision making process was not discriminatory in any way. A double blind analysis of the applications helped ensure that the best proposals would win, since names and company information were not included in the analysis of the applicants. To say otherwise is just to ask for special favors or quotas for one minority group or another, simply not needed, nor is it warranted.

HB 1236/SB 891 – Legalize Recreational Marijuana

A little bit sooner than I thought, the inevitable bill to legalize recreational marijuana was introduced this year. One of the main concerns over medical marijuana was the very predictable move to make marijuana legal, like Colorado and other states have done.

Thankfully the bill did not pass year, but watch out. This bill will be reintroduced next year, and it will be tempting for the Democrats to pass it so that it appears on the ballot in 2018, when Governor Hogan is up for reelection, as a Maryland Constitutional Amendment. To play politics with a policy this important and potentially detrimental is not wise policy making, and I will work to prevent this situation from happening next year.

HB 1 – Paid Sick Leave

One thing that was abundantly clear at the end of the 2016 Session was that the General Assembly would pass some type of “paid sick leave” bill this year. Similar measures have been introduced over the last several years, and some have passed the House but languished in the Senate. Legislation that nearly passed in 2016 would have been incredibly burdensome to businesses and stifling to job creation in the state.

Even though I am opposed to this kind Legislation, especially because in Western Maryland it means that businesses simply move either to West Virginia or to Pennsylvania, at least Governor Hogan’s proposed bill would have included moderate protection for businesses. The Governor’s initiative would have applied only to employers with 50 or more employees, providing up to 40 hours of accrued “paid time off”, that could be used for any reason. Employers with less than 50 employees would receive a tax credit to incentivize providing the benefit.

Rather than move forward with Governor Hogan’s more common-sense proposal, the General Assembly instead pushed forward with **HB 1 - Labor and Employment- Maryland Healthy Working Families Act**. This legislation mandates up to 40 hours of “sick and safe” leave for employees who work for businesses with 15 or more employees, carrying heavy fines for non-compliance.

This bill also requires paid sick leave for part-time employees who work as little as 8 hours per week, and it does not exclude temporary seasonal employees. So a teenager working after school, as well as summer workers in Ocean City, will qualify for paid sick leave under this bill. This bill will likely have a harmful effect not only for businesses, but also for jobs, and therefore, families. Bills like these encourage businesses to automate by forcing them to become creative to reduce their labor costs so that they can stay in business. In one example, we are already seeing fast food restaurants moving toward self-ordering kiosks where the cost of labor is too high. This type of legislation tends to hurt the very people the Legislature claims to be trying to help.

HB 533* - Food Stamps

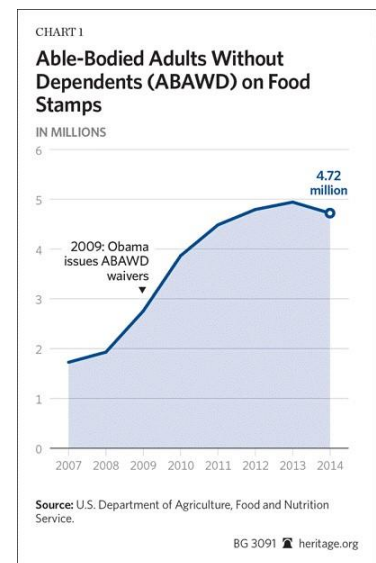
Currently, there are millions of "Able-Bodied-Adults-Without-Dependents" (ABAWD) receiving food stamps in the United States. I’m not sure about you, but I would hope that our government would institute laws to encourage people to become self-sufficient.

Previously in the United States, in order to get food stamps, you had to provide evidence of working, being in a work project, or volunteering 20 hours/week. HOWEVER, since 2009, when President Obama issued the work requirement waivers for "ABAWDs", the requests for food stamps increased nearly 150%, from nearly 2 Million to almost 5 Million. (See Chart 1, to the right)

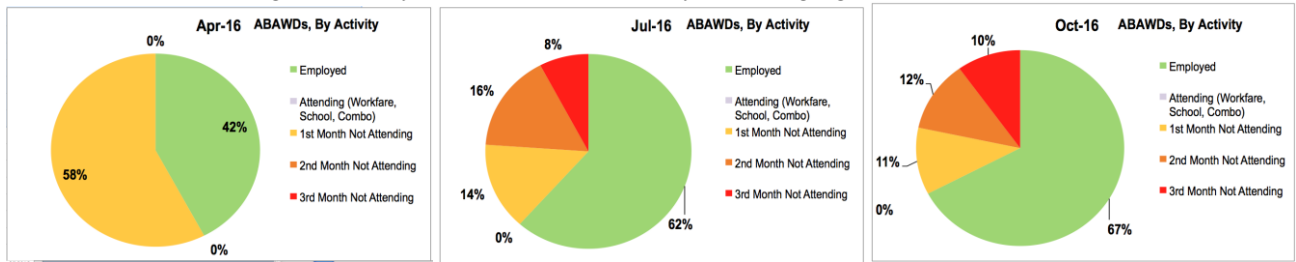
My bill, HB 533, says that Marylanders may not apply for a Federal waiver of the 3 month time limit on the receipt of benefits under the Food Stamp Program by an individual who:

- is an able-bodied adult without dependents (“ABAWD”)
- does not meet all applicable work requirements

Last year, I had introduced this bill to cover just Washington County, in an effort to encourage Washington County residents to become more self-sufficient and not increasingly dependent on Government handouts. We cannot control the National Food Stamp policy, but we could try to help Washington County Residents become self-sufficient. Right before the hearing, we received good news that Washington County no longer qualified for the waived work/volunteer requirements, which my bill would have put back in place.



The results for Washington County citizens have been very encouraging since then:



As the charts demonstrate, Washington County decreased from 3,550 ABAWDs in the Food Stamp program (45% were employed) to 2571 ABAWDs in the Food Stamp program with 67% employed. Reinstating the time limits for the receipt of food stamps encourages compliance with the work or volunteer provisions of the Federal Law and promotes a good work ethic, which leads to respect and basic dignity. This is a win-win situation. As a result, I introduced this bill in 2017 as a State-wide bill.

Unfortunately, it was defeated on largely partisan grounds, with a large consideration given to ABAWDs in Baltimore City. I believe the best thing we can do for people is to get them back to work and/or volunteering. As Thomas Jefferson said: *"I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them."*

SB 4 –Reauthorization and expansion of the Minority Business Enterprise Program – This bill claims to prevent discrimination against minorities and minority women by discriminating in favor of them. The bill refers to “statistical and anecdotal” evidence of discrimination (tortured numbers and tall tales in other words) based on the success or failure of minority businesses, and leaps to the conclusion that the “State would become a passive participant in private sector racial and gender discrimination if it ceased or curtailed its remedial efforts.”

I could not possibly vote for this bill. The pre-amble itself is based on false assertions, and the bill re-institutionalizes reverse discrimination. All citizens are entitled to equal protection under the laws – some citizens are not entitled to more. When will we learn that we cannot solve racial/sexual discrimination by racial and sexual discrimination? I hate to use platitudes, but we all know that two wrongs do not make a right.

One could argue that these programs were needed to right wrongs following the wrongful “separate but equal” doctrine that was overturned in the 1960’s. Even so, these reverse discrimination programs have been going on for over 40 years, and only seem to get bigger with time.

Unfortunately, this bill was passed unanimously in the Senate and almost unanimously in the House. I voted against it, as did my colleague, Delegate Deb Rey. Perhaps people will look back and consider this a courageous vote, but I don’t think so. I just re-read the inspirational “I have a Dream” speech by Dr. Martin Luther King. In the speech he indicates that, ***“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”*** For his children to see the fulfillment of this vision, we need to stop reverse discrimination and evaluate everyone based on their character alone. This type of law perpetuates discrimination and these discriminatory policies need to be eliminated, not reauthorized and expanded.

CRIMINAL

SB 835/HB 1362 - “Sanctuary State” - these companion bills would have made Maryland a “sanctuary” state for illegal aliens, put us in defiance of Federal law, and complicated the relationship between local police forces and federal immigration agents. In fact, an amendment to the bill which would have allowed local police to cooperate with Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement (ICE) officials when the illegal alien had committed a serious previous felony crime was voted down on the House floor. To intentionally tie the hands of local police to not cooperate with ICE officials when an illegal alien has committed murder or another heinous crime previously, just doesn’t make sense.

Most Marylanders were horrified at the news in March that two illegal aliens – aged 17 and 18 years old were enrolled in Rockville High School where they raped a 14 year-old girl. This simply would not have happened without the Obama Administration’s ignoring existing federal immigration law and failing to protect our borders. These two criminals had been detained in July, 2016 in Texas by a border patrol agent, but then released following Obama’s catch and release policy. They then made their way to Montgomery County, a known sanctuary area for illegal aliens.

The whole state of Maryland should not become like Montgomery County where we flagrantly ignore existing federal law and put our citizens in harms way just to make a political point. Now is the time to enforce our existing federal immigration laws, not try to skirt around them by making Maryland a sanctuary state. Thankfully in the end, common sense won out and this bill was defeated in the State Senate. Given the public outcry, we can only hope this is the last we will hear of this bill.

2nd AMENDMENT RIGHTS:

HB 608 – Castle Doctrine* - Right to Defend Property

I introduced this bill so that a person would be able to defend themselves in their own home against anyone who had made an unlawful entry into their dwelling. The bill would allow a person to use any degree of physical force necessary to defend themselves, without requiring that they attempt first to retreat, call the police, or otherwise justify their use of force.

This would prevent someone from being charged with murder for defending their home, their family, and their property. Otherwise, we will continue to further victimize those who have been already victimized, who defended themselves, and then are charged with a crime for defending themselves against a criminal attacker or burglar. 34 out of 50 states have the Castle Doctrine. I want to protect Maryland’s citizens in this same way, but unfortunately the bill did not pass this year.

HB 159 - Weapon-Free Higher Education Zones

Maryland’s Liberal Legislature not only did not pass the Castle Doctrine, but they continue to work to pass bills that will restrict our 2nd Amendment rights, bills that I work hard against. Last year HB 1002 was introduced in the house that would make all public institutes of higher learning, “firearm-free zones.” Although this may sound like a good idea at first, those intent on going on illegal shooting rampages on college campuses rarely pay attention to applicable gun laws or weapon-free zones. Therefore, this effectively means that no law-abiding citizen would have a firearm on a Maryland college campus with which to defend themselves and others.

The ‘weapon-free zone’ bill was re-introduced this year. While well intentioned, this bill goes against the common-sense saying that indicates, “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” This year’s version of the bill again sought to make it illegal to possess a firearm on the property of any college in the state of Maryland. While the intent of the bill is to protect students on college campuses, it is too broadly drawn and naively assumes that those considering gun violence will respect “gun free zones” and take their violence elsewhere. I believe that it actually sets up zones where gun violence crimes will be easier to commit with larger casualties.

There is a very small number of people who hold concealed-carry permits in the state, and an even smaller number of them, if any, are college students. If this bill is really about safety, then those in the most dangerous situations - so dangerous that the state has granted them special permission to carry a firearm to defend themselves - should not lose the right to defend themselves if they happen to go onto a college campus. This bill sacrifices the safety of some to offer a false sense of safety to others.

The bill passed the House and also the Senate this year, but with amendments in the Senate. Thankfully, the two versions could not be reconciled before the end of Session, so the bill was not passed. I anticipate it will return, however, next year, for another attempt to restrict our 2nd Amendment rights.

SB 281 Court Case Update – In 2014, SB 281 was passed which took away Second Amendment gun rights in Maryland (SB 281). Almost immediately a lawsuit against the bill was issued.

The Federal Appellate Court for the 4th Circuit issued a decision sending the case back to the lower court, agreeing that this is a case of Constitutional import, and requiring the court to use the higher standard of review given Constitutional cases. Writing for the majority, Chief Judge William B. Traxler, Jr. found that the Maryland law “significantly burdens the exercise of the right to arm oneself at home” and should have been analyzed using a more stringent legal standard. This was great news!

Thereafter, however, the Court granted the State’s Petition for an *en banc* review – where the full Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit (consisting of 15 judges) reheard the case. Unfortunately, on Feb. 21, 2017, the full Court of Appeals upheld SB 281, stating that “we have no power to extend Second Amendment protections to weapons of war.”

Chief Judge William B. Traxler, Jr. issued a very strongly-worded dissent to the majority opinion, pointing out that in saying that the 2nd Amendment doesn’t apply, “has gone to greater lengths than any other court to eviscerate the constitutionally guaranteed right to keep and bear arms.” Next stop: The U.S. Supreme Court, hopefully they will take the case and vote to overturn Maryland’s over-the-top bill restricting our 2nd Amendment Rights.

TRANSPORTATION:

SB 307 - Road Kill Bill Repeal - During the 2016 Legislative Session, the General Assembly passed a highly-partisan bill that meddled in Maryland’s transportation policy. “Fixing” a problem that did not exist, the bill manipulated the process by which major transportation projects were funded and skewed the preference towards funding mass transit projects in urban areas.

This bill earned the name “The Road Kill Bill”: its convoluted scoring system would “kill” all but 7 of the 73 major priority transportation projects in the state, with the vast majority of all funding being awarded to Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties. This new scoring system would even eliminate improvements to I-81 and I-70 in Washington County.

Governor Hogan made the repeal of this bill his #1 legislative priority in the 2017 Session. A compromise was reached in the Senate, and the bill was amended to delay implementation of any scoring system until after the 2018 elections. In the meantime, a workgroup of legislators and transportation officials would study the situation and issue a report regarding the scoring system. This bill passed unanimously in the House and Senate.

HB 603 (“Bryer’s Law”) - Out-of-State Motor Vehicle Insurance* – The tragic death of 5-year old Bryer Hendricks in Washington County revealed a loophole in our laws that made it impossible to punish the uninsured woman whose negligence killed Bryer in an automobile accident. This bill closes that loophole, and mandates automobile insurance for *every* driver in Maryland, not just Maryland drivers. This is especially important in Washington County with our close proximity to neighboring West Virginia and Pennsylvania. In fact, at any location in Maryland, we are never much more than a half-hour away from another jurisdiction. We are so saddened by this young girl’s tragic death and the additional trauma of seeing a negligent, uninsured driver go free when the Court of Appeals pointed out that Maryland’s Uninsured Motorist prohibition applied **only** to Maryland drivers. Bryer’s Law cannot replace what the Hendricks family has lost, but I was honored to be part of bringing some justice to a system that left families without even a basic recourse. Thankfully, Bryer’s Law passed and will become law in 2017.



Family provided photo

HB 534 - Railroad Crossing* - Did you know that right now certain motorists have to stop at all railroad crossings, even those crossings where a train will never cross the road because the tracks are torn up or the line has been abandoned? This bill recognizes that inactive Railroad Crossings should not require vehicles to stop before crossing.

Instead, the bill allows the State Highway Administration to place “Exempt” signs at those crossings, to allow those vehicles who otherwise must stop at all railroad crossings to not have to stop. The vehicles that currently must stop – even if the railroad tracks have been paved over, and it is obvious that no train could pass through – are school buses, church buses carrying 20 passengers or more, cars carrying passengers for hire (taxis, etc.), and carriers of hazardous/flammable material.

Thankfully this bill passed this year, and Maryland will join other states who use “Exempt” signing at inactive railroad crossings. Not only will this bill decrease unnecessary delays, but it will increase safety where vehicles are not stopping in the middle of the roadway for no real reason.



HB 1456 – Passing to the Right – Use of Shoulder* Have you ever crossed a white solid line to go onto the shoulder to go around a motorist who is waiting to turn left? Did you know you could get a ticket for that?

This bill allows motorists to legally pass left-turning motorists on the paved shoulder on a roadway with one travel lane in each direction, separated by a double yellow line. Not only is this safely done every day right now, but the State Highway Administration and other local roadway design agencies count on this movement to avoid long delays and queues on these types of roads.

ENVIRONMENT

Septic Systems – “BAT” Repeal - Governor O’Malley had issued an executive order requiring the use of “Best Available Technology” – or “BAT” – for all new septic systems in the State, an edict that added thousands of dollars to every homeowner’s septic system and tens of thousands to larger commercial installations. Governor Hogan recognized the overkill of that order, and wisely issued his own, requiring BAT only in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. Liberal Democrat Legislators tried to reinstall Governor O’Malley’s executive order by legislation, which we fought, and I’m happy to report that the bill was defeated. I have been very involved with this issue, including working on the summer study program, and I was very glad to help make sure that it didn’t pass. Adding almost \$9,000 to the cost of every new home on septic would be disastrous for our County, and does absolutely nothing to save the Chesapeake Bay. Governor Hogan is right: this should be taken up on a county by county basis.

HB 1325 – Banning Natural Gas Extraction - HB 1325 was passed and imposes a statewide ban on natural gas extraction, also known as fracking. Unfortunately, this policy affects Western Maryland disproportionately, as natural gas extraction could provide a benefit to the economy, especially in Garrett and Allegany Counties where the economy is not doing well and where the main natural gas extraction area in Maryland, Marcellas Shale formation, exists. Each of the county and state-elected officials from Garrett and Allegany County Governments support extracting natural gas, and this bill prevents local control of their own resources.

Providing more natural gas from our own country leads to the United State using fuels that are cleaner and helps us become more energy independent. For these reasons and others, I voted against the bill that bans natural gas extraction.

ELECTIONS:

Redistricting – Maryland is home to one of the most gerrymandered Congressional Districts in the United States. The Washington Post has called Maryland’s Congressional and legislative districts “grotesquely gerrymandered”, and it is not hard to see why. Even though Democrats hold a 2-to-1 advantage in voter registration in our state, they hold a 7-

ensuring that the person showing up to vote is who they say they are. Sadly, Democrats voted again against voter ID, but we cannot stop fighting for fraud-free elections.

HB539* - U.S. Citizenship verified for new voter registrations

Right now, the only oversight as to whether someone is a legal citizen or not is surprisingly open to voter fraud. The person registering to vote checks a box which says, 'I attest that I am a legal citizen.' The Maryland Board of Elections does not verify this citizenship claim, even though that would be very easy to do.

In Maryland, there were reports that several illegal aliens, people knowingly breaking our laws, were registered to vote. Election Integrity Maryland compiled data showing that many illegal aliens were registered to vote in Maryland, and dispersed that information to the public. They approached me with this information, and asked me to help by introducing a bill.

HB 539 would simply require the Board of Elections to actually verify that people who register to vote are US Citizens, and they are US Citizens who are allowed to vote. If we want to create elections that everyone can have faith in, only American citizens should be allowed to vote. This is not rocket science, and it is appalling that our Maryland Government is allowing fraudulent votes to be cast by not even checking citizenship status for new voters.

LOCAL BILLS/MISCELLANEOUS:

HB 870 – 2016 Black Fly Bill

Great news for Washington County! Governor Hogan put \$190,000 into the General Fund Budget to support the Black Fly Program for the pilot program in Washington County to spray for black flies. The funding was approved by the legislature and creates a safe solution to minimize the impact of the swarms of Black Flies that exist in southern Washington County. The program allows Maryland do what Pennsylvania has been doing for years to use a naturally occurring enzyme to separate black fly eggs from rocks, where they are normally attached in clusters. When the eggs are released, this prevents hatching and makes the eggs fish food.



Last year’s bill required the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a program to control the spread of black flies in the State – and in particular Washington County. I, along with Del. Nic Kipke, Sen. Serafini, and former Senator Chris Shank worked very hard to secure these funds and credit is also due to Judy Warner, from Rohrsersville, MD. She has worked so hard to get us to a place where we could get this funding for the upcoming budget year. This is really great news for Washington County and for all of the visitors to Antietam and the C&O Canal who should now be plagued by fewer swarms of black flies.

HB 607* – Real Property - Vacant and Abandoned Property - Expedited Foreclosure

If you are like many Marylanders, you may have a vacant property or properties in your neighborhood. I introduced a bill last year to provide for the expedited foreclosure of vacant and abandoned properties, establishing that it is the Secured Party’s (Bank’s) responsibility for general upkeep of that property, pending foreclosure. My bill last year led to an interim study to evaluate the long delays that occur in Maryland during the foreclosure process.



My bill this year, HB 607, worked to accomplish the same goal. In a bi-partisan effort, parts of my bill were incorporated into HB 702, which I’m pleased to report was passed. Although my bill would also have forced the banks that hold the loan to take care of the foreclosed property pending foreclosure, HB 702 does significantly speed up the foreclosure process for abandoned homes. This will help reduce the incidences of foreclosed properties falling into disrepair, bringing down the value of neighboring homes. I was happy to work with Delegate Marvin Holmes (D, Prince George’s County) to get a combination of his bill and mine passed this year.

HB 1442* – Safe Package Delivery Act

The 2016 Christmas season saw increased theft of delivered packages. One criminal duo was simply following a package delivery truck and picking up the packages almost as soon as they were delivered! When an alert homeowner called the police, they were arrested in a truck with some 70 stolen packages in their possession.

I introduced HB1442 as a way to help Maryland citizens take control over package delivery. The bill specified that delivery firms would provide a way for consumers to specify where they wanted their delivery placed, like “inside the screen door” or “by the garage door.” It also provided that customers could opt to always pick up packages and not have unsecured deliveries sent to their homes.



As a result of the bill, I met with the major package delivery providers (like FedEx and UPS). After these meetings, we discovered that FedEx and UPS both provide these options for registered users at this time. We partnered together to change (amend) the bill to make theft of parcels as a new category of crime, as package theft continues to rise. The bill was modified to make the theft of any package a felony, with a punishment similar in severity to the punishment for the theft of any U.S. mail. The changes were made to the bill, but to really have a good chance of passing, this kind of bill needed to be reassigned to the Judiciary Committee. While it was too late in session to be reassigned, I plan to reintroduce this bill again next year to better protect the deliveries of your online and telephone purchases.