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Appropriations Committee

Oversight Committee on Pensions

Transportation and the Environment
Subcommittee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Dear Friend,

After an eventful 90 days, the Maryland General Assembly's 2015 legislative session has now officially ended. Over the course of the last few months, the General Assembly has tackled many issues, including a challenging FY16 budget. I have championed many causes important to the residents of Baltimore City and Maryland, and succeeding in passing my first bill! I am pleased to share with you my first annual **End of Session Report** to keep you updated on what I have worked on in Annapolis this session.

While this Report covers many of the major issues we faced, it does omit some details and many bills. To read more, please sign up for my email updates and visit my blog at brookelierman.com. If you have any specific questions or concerns, please contact my office at (410) 841-3319.

A Better Budget – Maryland's FY16 Budget

In January, the Speaker appointed me to the Appropriations Committee, and to two subcommittees – the Transportation and the Environment Subcommittee and the Oversight Committee on Pensions. Thus, much of my work during the session involved work on our state's FY16 budget.

Under the Maryland Constitution, the General Assembly must pass a balanced budget each year. The State operates under a fiscal year that runs from July 1 to June 30. Maryland has a strong executive model, and the Governor proposes the initial budget early in session every year. The Legislature can then only cut or restrict funds in the budget – it cannot increase the overall budget or transfer funds to other purposes.

This year, Governor Hogan submitted his budget to the Assembly on January 22nd. As originally conceived, his FY16 operating budget cut cost-of-living increases for state workers, cut funding for mental health providers, canceled repayments owed to Program Open Space, cut Medicaid funding, and reduced funding for education. It was not a budget that I could have voted for. Governor Hogan challenged the Appropriations Committee to do better – and we did. After daily briefings and hearings, the Appropriations Committee produced a budget that not only cut our structural deficit by 75%, it also fully funded public education, provided COLA increases to state workers, and funded our health system. **It was both fiscally prudent and socially responsible.**

Although initially Republicans in both chambers supported the budget, and the Governor's Budget Secretary congratulated all the members of the Appropriation Committee on a "great job," in the end, every Republican voted against the final budget – against funding our schools, our state workers, and our local health departments. I am nonetheless proud of our budget, and now it is up to Governor Hogan to spend the money that we set aside including funding for GCEI

(schools), DDA services, state workers, and mental health workers. **Highlights of the FY16 budget include:**

<p>Education Funding Governor Hogan’s proposed budget included nearly \$144 million in education cuts and reductions to funding formulas, including a \$35 million cut to Baltimore City Public Schools. Our budget restores these funds and sets aside \$68 million dollars to fully fund the GCEI formula, adding \$11 million to Baltimore City Schools. Gov. Hogan must now act to spend those dollars for our students.</p>	<p>Health Care Governor Hogan’s budget cut access to services including maternity care, adult day care, and community health providers. The amended budget reverses those cuts, and protects access to doctors in rural and low-income communities by reversing the proposed reimbursement reductions to doctors who treat patients on Medicaid. Governor Hogan must now act to spend these funds.</p>
<p>Paying State Employees Fair Wages State workers received their first COLA increase in many years last year, and Governor Hogan’s proposed budget treated it as a one-year bonus, rather than as a promised raise. Our budget restores the COLA to these middle-class workers – Governor Hogan must now spend this money.</p>	<p>Protecting our Natural Resources Our budget requires state agencies to provide comprehensive reports on the overall framework to meet the requirement for a clean and healthy Chesapeake Bay by 2025. It also rejects the plan to cancel repayments to Program Open Space to ensure we are making green space a priority in Maryland.</p>
<p>Fiscal Responsibility The budget we passed closes 69% of the structural deficit - Governor Hogan’s budget and supplemental requests would have only closed 65% of the structural deficit. Our budget results in a structural deficit that is \$500 million smaller than the Governor’s budget over the next five years. In addition, all the national bond agencies reaffirmed Maryland’s coveted AAA bond rating! The rating agencies cited the state’s diverse and stable economy and high incomes, and the government’s prudent and conservative financial management.</p>	<p>Pension Plan The amended budget moves our pension system into a steadier position. Beginning next year, our pension system will be paid for using an actuarial accounting system. In addition, we will continue providing supplemental payments to the pension system to ensure that, as promised in connection with prior pension reform in 2011, our pension plan will be 80% funded by 2023.</p>
<p>The FY16 Capital Budget funds improvements, repairs, and expansions of facilities such as parks, hospitals, and schools. This year’s budget invests over \$1 billion in state infrastructure projects, including: (1) \$5 million for Community Parks & Playgrounds, (2) \$280 million in public school construction funding, (3) \$3 million for the Baltimore Regional Neighborhoods Initiative, and (4) funding for Cherry Hill Head Start, Port Discovery, Habitat for Humanity projects in Brooklyn & Mt. Winans, and Banner Neighborhoods, Inc.</p>	

Sponsored Bills

I ran for office to help build a better Baltimore and a better Maryland. My vision includes a City and State with safe, clean and green neighborhoods, great schools, good jobs, and better public transportation, and I introduced bills this session that would advance those goals. Here is a brief summary of a few of the bills that I introduced:

Great Jobs: Family-Supporting Careers

Flexible Leave Act (HB 345) – When a close family member needs care, Marylanders should be able to take time to care for them without fearing employer retaliation. Maryland’s FMLA already prohibits most kinds of retaliation, but unfortunately, some employers found a loophole retaliating against employees who have *requested* leave, but not yet used it. HB 345 closes this loophole – and is awaiting signing by the Governor after passing both chambers!

Paystub Transparency Act (HB 528) – For some employees, not having access to complete paystub information can mean they are vulnerable to unscrupulous employers who may under-pay them and include no information on their paystubs. Unfortunately, my bill to require basic reporting (that most employers already provide) on paystubs died in committee this year. I look forward to taking up the cause again next year!

Clean & Green Neighborhoods

The Community Clean Up and Greening Act (HB 551) – Maryland taxpayers currently spend millions of dollars every year on trash clean-up and removal. Plastic bags account for a significant portion of trash in our streets, parks, and waterways, including streams and rivers that flow to the Chesapeake Bay. HB 551 would have enacted a statewide ban on disposable plastic bags and encouraged recyclable bag use. We were not successful this year but will work with leaders over the interim to determine whether we will face better odds next year!

Improving Public Transportation

Maryland Transit Administration Oversight and Planning Board (HB 546) – This bill would have created a board of directors for MTA, aimed at improving our public transit system by mimicking the successes of other major metropolitan regions. Although this bill did not pass, I am committed to improving public transit in our City and State. With MDOT and other legislative leaders, I will be convening an MTA Study Group to meet several times in 2015 to ensure that systemic transit improvements are a top priority for MDOT and MTA.

Criminal Justice Reform

Civil Penalties for Shoplifting Repeal (HB 1239) – When I learned from a December 2014 Baltimore Sun article how civil recovery laws for shoplifting were being used by the nation’s largest retailers to intimidate and exploit vulnerable and often innocent individuals, I knew I had to act. With support from the State’s Attorney, Public Defender, Legal Aid, and others, we came very close to passing major reforms in the civil recovery process. Although this bill died in the last hour of session, next year we’ll try again to ensure these greater consumer protections.

The Maryland Second Chance Act (HB 244) – Although I was not the lead sponsor on this bill, I played a leadership role in its passage through the House of Delegates. This bill will enable Marylanders who have erred in their past and were convicted of certain misdemeanors to have a clean start by granting one chance to “shield” those records so that they can move on and find a good job and secure housing. Through my work at the Baltimore Station and with the Homeless Persons Representation Project, I know how important this bill is to enabling men and women around our region to fully rejoin society in a productive way. This bill is on its way to the Governor!

Promoting Entrepreneurship: Angel Investor & One Maryland Tax Credits

Because I am committed to building a stronger economy in Baltimore and throughout the State, I introduced two bills to promote entrepreneurship and job growth. First, I introduced a tax credit for **Angel Investors (HB 789)** to promote the availability of early stage funding for entrepreneurs.

In addition, I proposed an amendment to the **One Maryland Tax Credit (HB 810)**, which provides tax credits to employers that create at least 25 new jobs. My bill would have added “incubators” to the definition of “employer,” allowing these types of companies and non-profits to use this tax credit to grow their ability to aid start-up businesses. Although neither of these credits passed, I look forward to working on them during the interim and presenting them again next session.

Co-Sponsored Bills & Constituent Correspondence

I am also proud to have co-sponsored other important measures – some of which passed and some of which we must redouble our efforts to pass next year – including:

- A moratorium on hydraulic fracturing (HB 449) – Passed
- The Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (HB 1051) – Did not pass
- Promoting open government by amending the 45-year-old Maryland Public Information Act and bringing it up to date for the 21st century (HB 775) – Passed
- The Healthy Working Families Act, earned paid sick leave to workers (HB 385)–Did not pass
- “The Uber Bill” to create a regulatory framework for ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft to ensure their continued operation in Maryland (SB 868) – Passed
- Augustine Commission Legislation: As a result of a report by the Economic Development and Business Climate Commission, we passed several pieces of legislation that will recreate Maryland’s business-related agencies and help ensure Maryland is a great place to start, operate, and grow a business.

Two pieces of legislation prompted by Governor Hogan also passed:

The **Watershed Protection & Restoration Act (SB 863)** reforms the stormwater management law (also known as the “rain tax”) to make it stronger and more effective: Now, rather than requiring a fee on hard surfaces as the exclusive funding mechanism to fix our state’s aging stormwater and sewage infrastructure, local governments will have the flexibility to have a fee or use other methods. It is a step forward in the effort to clean the Bay!

The **Charter School Improvement Act (HB 446)** provides greater flexibility in student placement, greater operating flexibility for charter schools that have shown success after five years, provides that professional staff at charter schools are subject to the same certification as other public schools, and ensures local control over charters. This bill will strengthen Maryland’s public schools and provide greater flexibility to high-quality charter schools!

I received over 1500 contacts from constituents during the 90 days of session, and did my best to respond to each contact with a thoughtful reply after researching the issue and question posed. Here is a rough breakdown of some of the contacts I received:

Environmental Issues – 500+ contacts (Fracking, Pollinator, Healthy air, etc.)	Transportation Issues– 75+ contacts (Red Line, Gas Tax)
Budget Issues – 200+ contacts (Concerns about Governor Hogan’s budget cuts, COLA)	Education Issues –150+ contacts (Support more funding for schools, Charter Schools, Ed Tax Credit-pro/con)
Criminal Justice – 150+ contacts (Second Chance Act, Marijuana Legalization, Ex-Felon Voting Rights)	Health Issues – 200+ contacts (Mental Health providers, DDA budget, Nurse Practitioner rights, etc.)

Constituent Services

If you are facing any difficulty working with a State agency or have other concerns, please contact my office! My legislative director, Kimberly Routson, or I will be happy to work with you to try to remedy the issue. **Our office phone number is (410) 841-3319, and Kim and I can be reached by email at brooke.lierman@house.state.md.us.**

Over the past few months, I have enjoyed hearing from constituents via email and phone, and welcoming constituents to my office and our State House. I am here to work for you and with you to build a better Baltimore and a better Maryland! Please keep in touch.

My best,

Brooke Lierman