



**DELEGATE ERIC
EBERSOLE
DISTRICT 12**

**THE CONNECTION:
LEGISLATIVE
NEWSLETTER -
END OF SESSION 2019**

**PERIODIC NEWSLETTER TO KEEP YOU INFORMED AND UP
TO DATE WITH POLITICAL HAPPENINGS IN
ANNAPOLIS AND IN HOWARD AND BALTIMORE COUNTIES**



**A STRONG SESSION &
A BITTERSWEET END**

STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

Clean Energy Jobs Act/ Oysters

Minimum Wage

End of Life Options

Right to Read Act

Kirwan – Blueprint for Future

**Perscription Drugs- Oversight
Board & State Retirees**

LEGISLATION I SPONSORED

- Teacher & Parent on State Bd. of Ed.
- Community Schools
- Local Control of School Calendar
- Combatting Human Trafficking
- Combatting Hunger – Farm to Table
- School Safety
- Local Capital Improvements

A bittersweet end as we lose a friend & mentor



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Thank You

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving as your state delegate and representative in Annapolis. The 2019 legislative session concluded on April 8th, 2019, and we were able to address many of your concerns and issues through our legislative efforts. A special thank you to everyone who emailed, called, wrote letters, attended town halls, or came to Annapolis to speak to me about legislation that mattered to you. This session I received over 3,000 emails, dozens of letters or postcards, and hundreds of phone calls from my constituents. Your opinions and thoughts are of great value to me and guide my decisions.

Statewide Initiatives

I have always been an ardent supporter of legislation aimed at protecting Maryland's environment. This session I was proud to co-sponsor the **Clean Energy Jobs Act**, HB 1158. This bill is aimed at expanding Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard, which requires utilities to buy a certain percentage of electricity each year from renewable sources. This expansion would increase the current target of 25% by 2020, to 50% by 2030. While it seems ambitious, I feel that Maryland is capable of meeting this challenge. I believe that we must be taking action to combat climate change now, before the problem becomes insurmountable. I look forward to seeing Maryland become a model for what proper environmental sustainability looks like.



In addition, **Oyster populations** in the Chesapeake Bay are at an all-time low; the population is just 2% of historic levels. Their ability to filter the Bay and their commercial value make them a unique resource that we must protect. We are at a tipping point and bold action was necessary to save this keystone species for the Chesapeake Bay. I supported and we passed legislation to protect and restore 5 oyster sanctuaries. We are now securing the ability of these nurseries to send larvae throughout the Bay, incubate disease resistance, and provide the complex habitat that is not provided by harvested reefs.

The debate over raising the state **minimum wage** received a lot of attention this session. I heard arguments for and against this legislation from almost every sector of the Maryland economy. There were many aspects to consider when drafting this legislation, but I believe we managed to create an effective bill. On March 1st, HB 166 passed the House in a 96 to 44 vote. This bill will give 22% of our State's workforce – more than 573,000 working Marylanders – a pay raise starting in 2020. This legislation is critical for the future of our state, not just for those working minimum wage jobs, but for the overall economy of our state. I am proud to have been one of the 96 who voted in support of this bill, and I am looking forward to its implementation.



Another bill that received a lot of attention this session was the **End of Life Option**, or Richard E. Israel and Roger "Pip" Moyer Act. My belief in the importance of maintaining the quality and dignity of life moved me to be a part of this legislation. I also feel this is a human and individual rights issue that we need to enact. The bill was written carefully with multiple safeguards to protect against abuse and on March 7th, HB 399 passed through the House in a very close vote, 74-66. I have always been and will continue to be an advocate for the type of humane treatment of people outlined in this bill, and I am proud to have been one of the 74 that allowed this piece of legislation to pass through the House. I looked forward to seeing expedient implementation of this legislation and was disappointed that the bill failed in a 23-23 vote in the Senate. I am hopeful we will continue to fight for this basic human right for the sake of Marylanders who are battling painful and degrading terminal illnesses.



As a career teacher, issues of education are of great importance to me. The General Assembly enacted several pieces of legislation aimed at improving the Maryland public education system. One such bill that I was proud to co-sponsor was the **Right to Read Act**, HB 690. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, this bill would require each county board of education to ensure that students are screened to identify if they are at risk for reading difficulties. Identifying intellectual disabilities early in a child's life is critical for their success later. If we want our children to do well in school and accomplish their goals later in life, then we must give them the tools to do so now. This bill aims to do just that, and I am eager to see how it improves the education of our children.



At the start of this year's session, the **Kirwan Commission** reported on how to move Maryland's schools toward becoming a world-class system. The **Blueprint for Maryland's Future**, HB 1413, was based on information provided in the report and aimed to act on the Commission's recommendations. HB 1413 was heard in the

Ways and Means committee, of which I am a member. As an educator for almost 35 years, and a lifelong advocate for public education, I fully supported and contributed to this bill, voting in favor of its passage. It establishes full day pre-k for 4 year olds, incentivizes better salaries to attract and retain teachers, focuses funding on Community Schools (more on this later), sets aside funds for special education, and establishes an inspector general to monitor waste and fraud in our schools. While there is still a long way to go, I believe the passage of this bill is critical to the future of our state, and more importantly, to the well-being and education of our children.

Since I was first elected in 2014, one of the most troubling trends I have seen as a legislator has been the skyrocketing price of prescription drugs in Maryland. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, prescription drug prices are predicted to continue to rise at 6.1% over the next 7 years. I was proud to co-sponsor Delegate Pena-Melnyk's **Prescription Drug Affordability Board**, HB 768. This bill would create a board tasked with protecting Maryland residents from the high costs of prescription drugs. The board would have the ability to set upper price limits on drugs purchased by health plans that serve employees of state and county governments. This bill passed through the House in a 98 to 40 vote, and I am honored to be one of those 98. This legislation will



make Maryland the first state to implement such a program, and I hope to see our leadership motivate a trend across the nation in making drugs more affordable.

In addition to the concerns over the general increase in prescription drug prices, we also saw legislation introduced that was aimed at restoring **prescription drug benefit plans for retired state employees**. This is a very complex and troubling issue, and I am frustrated that our former state employees have not seen the proper response that they deserve. As a former teacher and a public state employee, I rely on these type of benefit plans to cover my medical expenses and therefore I understand how individuals depend on these promised benefits when making financial decisions and planning for retirement. Delegate Bromwell introduced HB 98 this session as a solution to this problem, and I was proud to co-sponsor this legislation. Unfortunately, Delegate Bromwell's bill failed to pass through committee. While this bill offered the best solution, and I would have loved for it to have passed this session, I had no choice but to consider support for other possible alternatives. Delegate Carey's bill, HB 1120, is one such alternative. While it is not as extensive as HB 98, I feel that any positive action in this situation is a step in the right direction. On March 25th, HB 1120 passed through the House in a 120 to 9 vote and I was among the 120 who supported this measure. While it may not restore retiree benefits to their previous state, I hope that we can use this bill as a foundation for further legislation next session. Our retired state employees were critical in making Maryland the great state that it is now, and I believe that we must honor their public service by securing their benefits once again.

Personal Legislation

This first year of my second term was one of my most successful. I sponsored several bills that will, with the Governor's signature, become law and I am grateful to my colleagues for their vote.

I am most proud of my bill that will add vital stakeholders, a parent and a teacher, to the **State Board of Education**. I will be pleased to see the insights and perspectives of those with "point of delivery" experience added to the policy making there.

I also passed a bill that would more fully define and identify the parameters of a community school. **Community Schools** are designed to make schools responsive to the needs of the students and families, especially focused on socio-economically challenged areas. This legislation would also set the conditions under which a community school gets established and receives funding.



Also, as a member of the **Maryland Commission on School Safety**, I have been focused on student safety. As part of that, I successfully sponsored a bill to require all schools in the state, public and non-public, to hold the number of fire drills recommended by the state fire marshal.

Additionally, I am relieved that I could help to restore local control to **school calendar** decision making. My legislation rescinded the overreach of the Governor's executive order on start and end dates. The complications of this inflexible requirement were numerous. One particularly disturbing effect was the pressure our superintendents sometimes felt to send kids to school in potentially dangerous weather – just to keep enough

school days between these rigid bookends. With school boards again able to do the job they were elected to do, we can get some local responsiveness and balance to educational, economic, safety, and community needs.

I'm also very proud to have passed a bill this year that would add training in the detection and reporting of **human trafficking** to Maryland's commercial driver's licenses. Human trafficking is a heinous crime, and similar programs in other states have been of great assistance to law enforcement. I cross filed this successful bill with Senator Klausmeier. I also passed a bill in the House to raise the maximum **fine for using a handheld device while driving**. Deterring people from driving while distracted is critical for the safety of our highways and roads. Unfortunately, this one was held in the Senate without a vote.



I sponsored and passed two bills that would enable tax credits. The first would offer an income tax credit up to \$5000 every year for a farmer who donates produce to a food bank. I believe that helping **farmers and the food bank** at the same time is a win-win. The second bill would give counties and cities the authority to offer a property tax credit that would benefit **robotics teams**. It would enable an incentive at the local level for property owners to donate or lease space to a school robotics program or nonprofit robotics program in Maryland. Robotics is a valuable tool in tech education and I am glad to be able to create this incentive.



Local Initiatives

I was very pleased with the outcome of the bond bills for **capital improvements** that I sponsored with Senator Lam and Delegates Feldmark and Hill. Together, we helped the Lansdowne Volunteer Fire Department secure \$75,000 in bond funding. In Howard County, we worked together to secure \$300,000 for the Harriet Tubman Community Center and Museum as well as \$50,000 for the new Community Action Council Early Childhood Education Center facility that will benefit Old Cedar Lane School in Columbia. In a different vein, I was also happy to help a local metal recycling business in Southwest Baltimore County with a regulatory complication they had by filing a piece of legislation that drew attention and motivated a prompt resolution.

A Difficult Ending to a Successful Session

Finally, I must take a point of personal privilege. We were dealt a blow in the legislature by the passing of **Speaker Michael Busch**. I had gotten to know him quite well, both personally and as a leader, in the last five years. He was an extraordinary man who inspired me to work very hard but to enjoy myself at the same time. His value system and his dedication to it were exemplary – and his aim was true. We will surely carry on with his brand of good work, but I will miss him.



Thanks again for your support and participation over the last 90 days. I am already eagerly looking forward to next year's session. As always, I hope that you will share your concerns and ideas with me. Please, stay in touch.
Yours,



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