

Friends,

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving you as your State Delegate and representative in Annapolis. The 2015 legislative session concluded on April 13th, 2015, and it was a very productive session in many ways. 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. Your input is incredibly valuable to me as I make decisions on laws that will impact your lives.

As a freshmen legislator, I was enthralled and had my eyes opened by being a part of this remarkable process. Absorbing all the stages of a legislative session and learning how to navigate the waters of making the laws for our state took a lot of focus and thinking on my feet. I have learned in governing, as in all parts of life, it is important to be kind, respectful, and sometimes even deferential to the others, especially the other honorable members of the legislature. Regardless of party or any perceived differences all of us are doing our best to do well by our constituents and the state at large. Building support and coalitions in the effort to pass bills requires establishing trust and credibility with colleagues (and also requires the support of at least 71 lawmakers in the house, though that cuts it a little close!). To that end, I also learned that getting a bill passed through both houses of the Assembly requires a great deal of tenacity. This may seem complex or inhibiting, but I find it relieving to know that making law is never done in haste, but with as much careful consideration of our elected officials as is possible.

So, I am thrilled to tell you that in my first session I introduced a bill that will be signed into law. HB452 is a commission to study the impact of state testing and assessments in public schools. This study is the first step towards reducing the number of tests students are required to take every year and make education more responsive to our students' needs. As a teacher, I've witnessed the growth of standardized tests over the years. In my own experience, state-mandated testing takes countless hours away from instructional time and slows down learning. The bipartisan coalition among lawmakers I mentioned previously was instrumental in passing this measure unanimously in both the House and the Senate. I expect that the Governor will sign this bill into law and it is my hope to be appointed to this commission as a legislative representative with a teacher's perspective. Already we have found common ground in the legislature and perhaps the beginning of meaningful reforms to reinforce the quality education we have built in Maryland.

We also had positive outcomes from the bond bills that I sponsored with Senator Kasemeyer and Delegates Hill and Lam. Together, we helped the Good Shepherd Services center earn \$100,000 in funding to help renovate their Boys Unit. Located right in the heart of Arbutus, Good Shepherd Services is a residential, non-profit center for adolescents with severe behavioral and emotional problems. The state funding we provided to help renovate the Boys Unit will create a more soothing environment that will dramatically increase the care and safety of both the residents and the staffers.

Additionally, two worthy Howard County projects were also the recipients of state bond funds. The Community Action Council, a provider of programs and services to low-income residents of Howard County, received money to help expand their food bank facility. The Howard County Conservancy, dedicated to educating youth and adults about environmental stewardship and ecosystems, was awarded funds to expand and renovate the Environmental Education Center. Both of these projects will benefit all of Howard County and had my full support.

There were several other key pieces of legislation that many constituents were concerned about this session. One of them was the Protect Our Health and Communities Act, which would have placed a five-year moratorium on hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking'. Though the moratorium was reduced to 2.5 years after careful consideration, the General Assembly successfully pushed it through. This moratorium is essential to ensuring that we fully understand the environmental, public health, and financial consequences of 'fracking' before we make the irreversible decision to introduce it in Maryland.

There were several other bills I supported with an environmental focus that did not become law this year, including the Pollinator Protection Act. This bill would have required warning labels to be included on chemicals and plant treatments that are deadly to bees, which support our agriculture in vital ways. We have also continued the fight on the environment with legislation trying to increase the use of renewable energy and encourage cleaner air in the state. Many never left committee, but others were successful despite a difficult political climate. I'll continue to push forward to make Maryland a model in environmental progress as we are a model in so many other ways.

By far, the most significant issue to my constituents this session was the state budget. Maryland has a strong executive budget, which means that the governor creates it, and the legislature acts as a check on the allocation of those funds. The governor's original budget cut K-12 education, cut funding for mental health providers, eliminated a cost-of-living raise for state employees, and cancelled repayments that the state promised to Program Open Space. My colleagues on the House Appropriations committee worked tirelessly this session to improve on that proposed budget, and in the end, I believe that the legislature passed a budget that, with the governor's cooperation, would be fiscally prudent and socially responsible at the same time. The budget that passed on the final day of the session reduces our state's structural deficit by 69%, with more of the gap scheduled to be closed next year, maintains our state's excellent AAA bond rating, the highest possible rating, and fully funded K-12 education - all with no new taxes.

We also passed a bill that reforms the state's storm water remediation fee, also referred to as the "rain tax." This new measure allows local governments to relieve the burden of this fee on homeowners and businesses and decide their own method of funding. The federally mandated effort promotes the health of the Chesapeake Bay and this bill creates a reporting mechanism to ensure that local governments are doing their part.

Thanks again for your support and participation this session. I am eagerly looking forward to the next session. I have several ideas for future legislation and I would welcome you to share your concerns and ideas with me. Stay in touch please.

Yours,

Delegate Eric Ebersole