

March 2015 Newsletter

Hello from Annapolis! It has now been a little over two full months here in the legislative session, and things are in full swing. Monday, March 23rd is crossover, the day when the bills from the Senate get passed over to us, and vice versa. We are giving all bills serious consideration, but with some real alacrity. There is some legislation stirring up interest among constituents, and I've detailed the topics below.

Education

- The biggest issue here is the budget and its impact on funding for education. The formula to determine funding is based on two variables: cost increases, and student number increases. Student enrollment has increased in both Baltimore and Howard counties in recent years. With the enrollment increase in mind, it will take more money than last year to maintain our efforts to create flourishing learning environments. The Governor has recommended far less than our funds last year, creating an obvious problem. The Governor has proposed these cuts in a way that it looks like there is more money in the budget; however, it is *less* money **per** student. With these cuts, we will lose teaching positions while class sizes are steadily increasing. We are coming up with creative ways to combat the funding cuts, by finding other funding for education that will not impact other services or raise taxes.
- I am the primary sponsor of a bill to create a commission to study the impact of standardized testing in schools, and ultimately lower its amount. Its value is continuing to find traction in the legislature—stay tuned in the coming weeks for more information.
- One particular bill that has fostered much opposition is one that relaxes the requirements for charter schools in Maryland. I am in favor of charter schools, and I think they address a very real need for specialization in public education. The Governor is claiming that Maryland's charter school law is among the weakest in the country when, in fact, it is one of the strongest. Our current regulations on charter schools help to insure that ones we commission are exceptional. I do not think that a bill to relax these standards is in the best interest of our students. We must not value the quantity of charter schools over their quality. Weak, poorly managed charter schools can over-promise and under-deliver, are likely to close down with very little notice, and often leave the public school system with students who are in need of remediation. I think that our existing system, which allows well-run charters to thrive, does not need the amount of change that has been proposed.

Environment

- There are two main problems we are facing here: the Governor's budget cuts, and his loosened restrictions concerning phosphorus management and smokestack emissions. The Governor has not made the environment his priority, and he has gone as far to suggest lifting the executive ban on fracking. These were executive initiatives, which means they were not passed by the General Assembly and the Governor can adjust or remove them at will. Our strategy in the face of these policy shifts is to make the original executive initiatives into law, which will

mean that the decision to drastically change positive environmental regulation and policy will have to pass throughout the General Assembly.

Economy

- It is important to know that the General Assembly **has** to balance the Governor's budget, it is a constitutional mandate. It is my job, as your legislator, to ensure that it is balanced in a way that preserves the extraordinary level of service we enjoy in Maryland. The factors that are the front of my mind when looking at the budget are maintaining the health of the Chesapeake Bay and attracting new businesses to our state through the creation of an educated workforce. I am doing all I can to hold the line on new taxes to help our economy continue to rebound.

If you're interested to know more about the budget for Fiscal Year 2016 and what it means for Maryland, follow this link for an overview given out by the Democratic Caucus: <http://www.ericebersole.org/understanding-the-budget.html>

Health

- The issue of human trafficking in Maryland is one that is very real, and often overlooked. I have supported several pieces of legislation that take strides in educating the public about this problem, and giving law enforcement some teeth in addressing those who attempt to enslave other humans in our State. This is an invisible crime, but it is a heinous and insidious one that we need to combat head on.
- I have introduced a bill to make the sale of powdered caffeine illegal in Maryland. Companies are now selling pure, undiluted caffeine as a nutritional supplement, but caffeine in this form much, much stronger than the concentrations found in coffee or energy drinks. In fact, the recommended dose of powdered caffeine is 1/32nd of a teaspoon! It is easy to confuse caffeine powder with other nutritional supplements, or flavored drink powder, and it is very difficult it is to measure out 1/32nd of a teaspoon. Two teenagers have already died as a result of treating this powder like it were drink mix. Other states have legislation regarding this issue, and I hope that Maryland will pass this law.

That's all for now, my next newsletter in April will be a full wrap up of this legislative session. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Best,

Eric D. Ebersole



Eric Ebersole
eric.ebersole@house.state.md.us

State Delegate, District 12
House Office Building, Room 350
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401