



**DELEGATE ERIC
EBERSOLE
DISTRICT 12**

**THE
CONNECTION:
LEGISLATIVE**

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



SESSION BEGINS!

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A NEW SESSION BEGINS!

Hello again and welcome from Annapolis. I am excited to be back in our state's capitol for our annual 90-day legislative session, which began on January 13th. We're only three weeks in, but the legislature hit the ground running as always. As I begin my second session as your delegate, I'm finding very different tone from last year- which was the first session for our governor as well as nearly 60 house members. Last year the session began with an expectation of some real bi-partisanship and open communication. Unfortunately, the Governor has made several decisions, both during and after session, that needed to be addressed by those of us who want a change for the better and in the long term here in Maryland.

There were six bills that passed both the house and the senate last year that the Governor chose to veto. This session began with the general assembly overriding many of those vetoes. One vetoed bill was a bond measure to provide funds to renovate the Maryland Arts Hall in Annapolis, building that gets use by groups from across the state and was seeking to increase its accessibility for the disabled. Two of the bills were strongly supported by the business community to end the unfair practice of online booking companies collecting sales tax from Maryland consumers but then not passing the full amount of tax collected back to the state. That practice hurt both Maryland taxpayers and the hotels that are based here.

The final three bills concerned criminal justice issues. The first corrected an oversight that was made when the legislature decriminalized marijuana; possession of small amounts of the drug itself became subject to a citation and fine instead of an arrest and jail time; however, the paraphernalia was still a criminal offense. I was very glad that the veto was overridden and that mistake was corrected. We also reinforced a law that said that the state can only confiscate property during an arrest if that property was connected with a crime. Finally, the house has made it so that citizens are eligible to vote upon release from prison after serving their sentence for a felony, instead of waiting until the probation period has ended.

THE BUDGET AND EDUCATION:

I am happy to report that initial indications are that several of the budget items that the Governor cut last year are going to get the funding they need. In particular, last year the Governor cut the \$138 million Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI), which is a measure designed to provide greater funding to jurisdictions where the cost of providing education is greater. Through some very hard work by the legislature, the Governor was

convinced of the need for this fund, but still only returned half to the urban and suburban counties that count on it, leaving the rest “fenced off” and unused. We passed legislation to treat GCEI as a mandate in the future, rather than an executive privilege, so GCEI will be fully funded in this year’s budget. We will remain vigilant for any further cuts in this area. As both a lawmaker and a Maryland public school teacher for 35 years, I believe that our school system is one of the most important areas we fund in Annapolis, and I want to see Maryland remain as one of the very top states in the nation for education.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION:

I continue to be a champion of protecting our environment.

We are continuing to find ways to

keep our agricultural economy robust while making sure

that it is not damaging the Chesapeake

and our waterways. We must also continue to hold urban

and suburban areas responsible for

reducing their impact on the bay. We passed a moratorium

on fracking last session and it will last

a few years, but we will have to take this issue up again in the future and we are poised to do so.

I believe that public transportation has to be a major part of any discussion of the environment.

We need to reduce our reliance on individual automobiles and fossil fuels, and move toward

reliable, efficient and comprehensive transportation for all. The

Governor killed the Red Line in

Baltimore, which wasted the \$300 million already invested in the project and cost Maryland \$900 in federal funding for the Baltimore-area light rail system. In the wake of that decision, Maryland environmentalists have to regroup and focus on creating a real solution for public transportation in Baltimore- beyond more buses.

NEW LEGISLATION AND INITIATIVES:

Last year, I sponsored a bill that created a commission to study the

use of standardized tests in schools. I’ve been serving on that

commission since late fall, and I am looking forward to the

positive changes I am sure it will bring about. While the

commission is still making its recommendations, I have introduced

two bills this session that also deal with testing. One of those bills

is designed to how much weight standardized test scores have in

teacher evaluations. Especially when the tests are of dubious value,

I want to make sure that teachers are professionally assessed by

multiple factors, not just test scores. The other bill will require school systems to notify parents quarterly of the number, type, and duration of standardized tests that their children will be taking.

I am also drafting legislation to create a training program for paraeducators. This training will give paraprofessionals who teach autistic students the tools they need to effectively manage any behavioral issues that arise. This legislation was suggested by a constituent after a school in Harford County discovered that staff members had been mistreating special education students when behavior problems happened. Another bill that I am working on asks school systems to reduce the amount of added sugars being served to our students in their school lunches and breakfasts.

I am also re-introducing a bill that seeks to limit the effect of the Citizens United decision on Maryland elections. This bill will reduce the ways that secret, corporate donors can effect our elections.

LET ME HEAR FROM YOU:

As always, I love hearing from my constituents- whether you have opinions on any legislation, have an idea for a bill that should be introduced, or need help with any government agency, please feel free to contact my office any time.

Best,



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