



*The Senate of Maryland*  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

April 15, 2025

Dear Neighbor:

The 447<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) officially concluded on April 7, marking the end of one of the most consequential 90-day periods in a generation. We entered the 2025 Session with two overarching tasks: (1) tackling a multi-billion-dollar budget deficit amidst federal chaos; and (2) advancing policy to reduce Marylanders' energy bills in the short-, medium-, and long-term.

I am pleased to report that the Maryland Senate met the moment. At a time of economic uncertainty, federal dysfunction, and rising energy costs, we chose to lead — with clarity, compassion, and a commitment to protecting the future of every Maryland family.

Accomplishing those objectives while passing legislation to improve the lives of all our State's residents required honest and difficult conversations about our fiscal responsibilities and enduring priorities. From the moment we gathered in Annapolis on January 8, our work focused on adapting to new realities while maintaining the stability Maryland individuals, families, and small businesses rely on.

In the wake of the transition to a new presidential Administration in January, the MGA faced seismic shifts in policy coming from Washington, culminating in a nearly \$350 million reduction in expected personal, corporate, and sales tax revenues over a two-year period due entirely to federal chaos and job losses. In addition, the State learned of up to \$418 million in federal funds being withheld to our public schools, \$305 million of which school systems had already spent, in addition to \$330 million in transportation funding summarily pulled back despite grant agreements.

These drastic and unprecedented actions spurred the MGA to redouble our commitments to core Maryland values including reinforcing Marylanders' constitutional protections, safeguarding access to health care, enhancing protections for Maryland's immigrant communities, defending reproductive freedom, and accelerating the State's transition to cleaner, cheaper energy. When federal support wavered, we provided clarity and a vision for the future.

Throughout it all, we remained focused on delivering results for the people of Maryland. Now, with the 2025 Session behind us, I look forward to continuing the work in Maryland's 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative District until the MGA reconvenes next.

Below is an overview of key measures and legislative priorities the MGA addressed during the 2025 Legislative Session:

**Passing a Balanced Budget that Maintains Core Commitments to Marylanders:** The MGA met its constitutional obligation to balance the **Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) budget (HB350 and HB352)** by cutting spending while protecting schools, law enforcement, and health care services. The legislature approached the State's budget deficit with a strategic mix of nearly \$2 billion in necessary cuts and \$1.2 billion in new revenue proposals, including changes to personal income taxes which will result in 94% of filers paying the same or a lesser amount. This targeted and balanced approach allowed us to avoid other revenue options like a \$.75 delivery tax, a broad-based business-to-business tax, or the elimination of itemized deductions for Maryland tax payers.

Despite disruptions in federal funding streams, we committed to preserving core services and protecting Maryland's most vulnerable residents. Our \$66.9 billion FY26 Operating Budget, which was \$400 million less in general funds than the FY25 budget, includes:

- \$15.6 billion in funding for Medicaid, covering about 1.5 million residents;
- \$594.4 million in new funding for our public schools, representing a 7.3% increase from FY25;
- \$500 million in new revenues to support the State's transportation and aging infrastructure needs;
- \$181.5 million restored in Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 for community services for those with developmental disabilities;
- \$139 million invested in growing the private-sector economy;
- \$121.8 million in police aid, \$46 million above the statutorily required amount, in addition to \$60 million in victim services funding and \$5.5 million for community-based services for young people;
- \$100 million for climate pollution reduction efforts at the State and local levels; and
- \$2.4 billion in cash reserves, including \$2.1 billion in the Rainy Day Fund and \$317 million in the General Fund to protect against continued federal uncertainty in the year ahead.

**Lowering Energy Bills by Promoting the Affordability, Reliability, and Predictability of our Electric Grid:** As the MGA entered the 2025 Legislative Session, Marylanders started receiving unacceptably high energy bills. We had to take immediate action. Demand for electricity in Maryland and throughout the country is rising at an untenable rate. At the same time, coal and oil electric generation stations are retiring; while this is good for slowing climate change, it also has led to increased energy prices. To curb rising prices, the MGA introduced a leadership energy package to lower bills as quickly as possible. As passed, the package advances a comprehensive solution to enhance energy affordability and reliability. This is the most aggressive energy affordability package for Marylanders in decades.

- The **Next Generation Energy Act (SB937)** provides a \$200 million refund (averaging \$80 per customer) to residential electric customers in two installments (once in the summer and once in the winter), expedites new and cleaner in-state generation to decrease our reliance on power from surrounding states, creates cost containment mechanisms around utility companies' spending on gas infrastructure, ensures multi-year rate plans provide a tangible benefit to customers while capping costs, removes waste incineration from Maryland's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard subsidy program, and ensures large load customers like data centers pay their fair share.
- The **Renewable Energy Certainty Act (SB931)** makes it easier to build renewable energy projects like solar and battery storage by removing unnecessary local roadblocks, places a first-in-the-nation 5% cap on the amount of agricultural land which can be used for solar, and allows local governments to participate in community solar programs.

- The **Energy Resource Adequacy and Planning Act (SB909)** creates a new Strategic Energy Planning Office to streamline energy forecasting and reduce dependence on external grid operators, ensuring Maryland's energy grid is more resilient and reliable.

**Fighting Back Against Federal Government Chaos and Overreach:** Maryland is one of the most vulnerable states in the country to the fallout from the chaos in the federal Administration, with an outsized number of federal employees and contractors, a large number of federal agencies physically headquartered here, and billions-of-dollars granted to our research institutions. In response to the mass and indiscriminate firings of dedicated federal public servants, the MGA advanced **Sen. Ben Kramer's SB749** requiring the Maryland Department of Health to expedite license approval for fired federal health care workers who have been licensed in other states. Through **HB1424**, we created a financial assistance program for laid-off federal workers outside of the normal unemployment insurance system and created an expedited process for hiring those workers into State government roles. And we created a bipartisan, Senate and House Joint Federal Action Oversight Committee to monitor how ongoing federal actions are impacting the State so we can respond quickly and as needed. We also took steps in **HB1222** to protect our immigrant communities from lawless and warrantless actions by preventing immigration enforcement in sensitive locations like schools, hospitals, and religious institutions, in addition to making it easier for immigrants who are victims of crime and aiding police investigations from facing deportation with **SB608**.

**Developing World-Class Public Schools for All Maryland Children:** The Blueprint for Maryland's Future remains one of the most transformative education investments in our State's history. It is already expanding access to publicly funded Pre-K, strengthening teacher pipelines, and building clearer pathways to college and career readiness as students graduate. The **Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act (HB504)** builds on those efforts by giving local school systems increased flexibility around some State funding, extending career counseling services, creating a school leadership training program for administrators, building pathways for more school professionals to enter the teaching profession, and strengthening the community school model. Moreover, through **SB68**, we required the State Department of Education to create a restorative practices plan, ensuring all schools are adequately supporting childrens' socioemotional well-being. Finally, we took steps to strengthen the **Truancy Reduction Pilot Program (HB1442)** as we seek to address chronic absenteeism following the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Reducing Crime and Maintaining Safe Neighborhoods:** Enhancing public safety so individuals and families feel safe in their communities remains of paramount importance. The MGA took steps to reinforce our justice system by cracking down on reckless and aggressive driving through the **Sergeant Patrick Kepp Act (SB590)**, as well as enabling prosecutors to aggregate multiple theft offenses by the same individual in multiple counties through the **Organized Retail Theft Act of 2025 (SB11)**. With **SB360**, we created avenues for individuals who are victims of revenge porn generated by artificial intelligence to seek justice as we navigate this new technology and its consequences. And we passed the **Rape Kit Testing Tracking Program and Grant Fund (SB669)**, which supports investigations into older, untested sexual assault kits and extends the submission deadline for evidence. This legislation addresses critical backlogs in rape kit testing and improves law enforcement's ability to respond to sexual assault cases. We will continue providing police and prosecutors with the resources and tools needed to protect Marylanders.

**Creating an Equitable Justice System Focused on Rehabilitation:** Sustained public safety requires a justice system focused on rehabilitating those who commit crimes before they re-enter our communities. Punitive approaches make recidivism more likely and we must ensure individuals involved with the justice system are given opportunities to become productive members of society after they have served their sentences. We passed the **Expungement Reform Act of 2025 (SB432)** to expand the number of misdemeanor offenses eligible for expungement, reduce expungement waiting periods, and prohibit certain minor charges from appearing on the

Maryland Judiciary Case Search. Further, we advanced the **Second Look Act (HB853)**, which recognizes that individuals who commit crime early in life have the capacity to change and allows those individuals to seek a hearing for a reduced sentence after serving at least 20 full years of their sentence. Additionally, we modified parole considerations for individuals 65 and older, streamlined the medical parole process, and directed savings from these parole processes to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services for reinvestment with the passage of **SB181**.

**Preserving High-Quality Health Care Our Residents Rely On:** Access to affordable healthcare and prescription drugs is critical to the wellbeing of all Marylanders. One of the most important tasks for the MGA this Session was to strengthen these programs regardless of potential federal cuts. We passed the **Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for All Marylanders Now Act (SB357)** to empower the Prescription Drug Affordability Board to set price limits on vital medications, offering relief to families struggling with high costs. We also know that telehealth remains a critical tool in the toolbox for Marylanders seeking care, which is why we passed the **Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025 (SB372)** to ensure its availability in the future. By advancing **SB5**, the General Assembly made permanent the State-Based Young Adult Subsidies Pilot Program, ensuring young people continue to have the ability to purchase affordable health insurance through the Maryland Health Benefits Exchange. We know that health outcomes are too often determined by race, class, and other societal factors, so we mandated the Maryland Department of Health to create a health equity dashboard to better track these disparities so that we can hold health professionals more accountable to outcomes through **SB684**. Building a healthier Maryland saves lives. No one should have to choose between access to affordable care and putting food on the table.

**Supporting Maryland's Public Servants:** Maryland's government has a responsibility to protect and support those who dedicate their lives to serving the public good. Following the murder of Davis Martinez, a parole and probation agent killed while on duty, the MGA held multiple hearings in 2024 to get to the root of the problem. Those legislative oversight hearings led to the introduction of **Sen. Ben Kramer's Davis Martinez Public Employee Safety and Health Act (SB26)**, which establishes a new unit within the Maryland Department of Labor to oversee the safety of public employees. This unit will enforce regulations, set penalties for public bodies and elected officials who fail to comply, and strengthen the overall safety measures for public employees. We also know firefighters throughout our State are exposed to caustic chemicals while on the job, too often leading to long-term health issues including cancer. We advanced the **James "Jimmy" Malone Act (SB374)**, which requires counties with self-insured employee health benefit plans to provide free preventive cancer screenings for firefighters according to the latest guidelines from the International Association of Fire Fighters. These reforms are long overdue.

**Expanding Access to Affordable Abortion Care:** In the 2024 General Election, Maryland voters overwhelmingly voted to enshrine the right to abortion care in our State constitution. Making reproductive care a constitutional right was a critical step to protecting access, but affordability is wholly distinct from availability. Moreover, as surrounding states restrict a woman's right to choose, individuals from out-of-state are seeking necessary care here where they are free from political interference. To build on the constitutional amendment incorporated last November, the MGA passed **SB848** to establish a first-of-its-kind public health abortion grant program to increase access and finance the support network of abortion funds and providers in Maryland. This program utilizes existing and unspent insurance premiums for abortion coverage already set aside and required to be collected by the Affordable Care Act, totaling an estimated \$25 million in surplus funds with an additional \$3 million accruing each year. All people should have access to the care they need regardless of whom they are, where they live, whether they are insured, or how much money they earn.

**Supporting Maryland's Seniors and Nursing Home Residents:** Maryland's seniors and nursing home residents are some of the most vulnerable in our society, and we have a heightened duty to meet their needs. The

Legislature passed **SB223** to expand **Sen. Ben Kramer's** Senior Call-Check Service and Notification Program as the Social Connections Program. This initiative provides older adults at risk of isolation with regular check-ins through phone calls, text messages, video chats, and in-person visits. Beyond wellness checks, the program fosters purposeful social engagement by connecting seniors with local volunteer networks, community events, and peer support groups. Further, we recognized the Maryland Department of Health lacks sufficient capacity to conduct inspections and complaint investigations of nursing homes throughout the State. To compensate for this staffing shortage, the Legislature authorized local jurisdictions to take on this responsibility upon a county's request through **Sen. Ben Kramer's SB376**.

**Advancing Basic Consumer Protections:** Far too often, consumers get locked into costly subscriptions they never meant to renew—buried in fine print or auto-renewed without clear notice. This year, we took action. The Maryland General Assembly passed **SB49** which requires companies to clearly disclose the terms of any automatic renewal offers, including the post-trial price and a simple way to cancel — no more surprise charges months later. This law ensures Marylanders are fully informed and in control when they sign up for services, protecting both their wallets and their rights.

**Protecting the Chesapeake Bay and our State's Natural Resources:** Maryland's identity is inseparable from its waters—the Chesapeake Bay, our rivers, and countless streams and estuaries that nourish our ecosystems and communities. But climate change, driven by rising seas and decades of unchecked corporate pollution, threatens this legacy. In 2025, we acted decisively. We passed the **RENEW Act (SB149)** to confront Maryland's largest polluters by studying their emissions and assessing the long-term environmental costs they've created. This lays the groundwork for holding them accountable and shaping future environmental policy.

We also advanced the **Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act (HB506)** to fund regenerative agriculture, oyster aquaculture, and water quality improvements—proven strategies to restore the Bay's health and resilience. And through **SB901**, we expanded Maryland's framework for producer responsibility, making corporations—not taxpayers—responsible for recycling the packaging waste they create. Once fully implemented, this policy will reduce litter, improve recycling outcomes, and relieve local governments from an unfair financial burden. These steps aren't just about conservation—they're about protecting Maryland's future.

**Safeguarding the Right to Vote:** While other states make voting harder, Maryland strengthened access to the ballot. The Legislature passed **Sen. Ben Kramer's SB93** to ensure voters continue receiving clear instructions to request a mail-in ballot with every State Board of Elections mailing. With **SB685**, we guaranteed multi-lingual support at polling places for those who need it. And in passing **HB586**, we expanded service learning credit for student election judges and created new incentives to boost turnout among trained poll workers. Our democracy is strongest when every voice can be heard.

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY FUNDING:** As the Chair of the Montgomery County Senate Delegation, I continued to work closely with my colleagues to ensure that Montgomery County, again, received a record amount of state funding for a multitude of important needs and projects in the County.

**OPERATING BUDGET:** State aid to Montgomery County for the coming fiscal year will be \$1.2 billion with over \$1 billion, of that amount, directed to our public schools for kindergarten through the twelfth grade. The funding that Montgomery County will receive also includes:

\$4 million for Libraries  
\$75 million for Montgomery College  
\$5 million for the Health Grant Formula  
\$52 million for Transportation  
\$21.5 million for Public Safety

**CAPITAL BUDGET:** Montgomery County received a significant amount of money for Capital Projects totaling \$108 million dollars including hundreds of thousands of dollars to be invested right here in our communities throughout District 19.

On a personal note, in addition to the bills already noted for which I was the lead sponsor (expedited license approval for federal health care workers to help fill vacant state health care positions; Davis Martinez Public Employee Safety and Health Act; Senior Call-Check and Social Connections Program; authorization of Montgomery County's Health Department to inspect nursing homes that the state has failed to inspect; greater opportunities to vote by mail), I was also the lead sponsor of Legislation to:

- Prosecute those who badly abuse animals and to allow the court to prohibit them from owning animals in the future.
- Allow law enforcement officials and local health department officials broader opportunities to shut down brutal cock-fighting operations in the state.

This bill was the top priority of the Human Society.

- Require the Maryland Health Department to collect valuable data on the prevalence of Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia throughout Maryland communities. The Department must use this information to expand and coordinate efforts with the public to achieve improved outcomes to better understand and lessen this terrible disease (Maryland has the highest per-capita rate of Alzheimer's Disease in the nation.).

This legislation was the top priority of the Alzheimer's Association.

- Reduce speeding on MD Rt. 200, Intercounty Connector

Working with my District 19 colleagues, Bonnie Cullison, Charlotte Crutchfield and Vaughn Stewart, is always a pleasure.

Working together we have been successful in assisting our constituents with the best service of any legislative team in state government.

It is an honor to represent you in the Maryland State Senate, and I will continue my work to ensure a quality education for our children, a healthy environment, good job opportunities, equality for all of our residents and to protect and better the lives of our elderly.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues of interest.

My thanks and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben", with a stylized, cursive script.

State Senator Ben Kramer