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Legislative District 14  
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

*Subcommittees*

Early Childhood

Local Revenues



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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I am grateful to write to you today to report on my third legislative session as your District 14 Delegate. This session has been a challenging one as our legislative body worked tirelessly to pass a responsible budget and revenue package, protect our gains in education and healthcare, and strengthen our economy. I also worked collaboratively with Delegate Pam Queen, Delegate Anne Kaiser, and Senator Craig Zucker to secure funding for District 14, Montgomery County, and the rest of Maryland. Read further for some of the legislative highlights from our session.

The application for my office's legislative scholarship remains open for District 14 residents pursuing higher education at a Maryland institution. Further information and the application are available at <https://tinyurl.com/bmn2025application>. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2025.

Additionally, if you or someone you know has unfortunately lost their job at a federal agency as an employee or as a contractor, I encourage that you utilize the resources made available here: <https://labor.maryland.gov/federalworkers>. The resources include re-employment workshops, how to transition to the private sector or starting a business venture and job fairs.

Furthermore, if there is anything that I can do to support you and our district, or to consider in my role as a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, please feel free to call my office at 410-841-3539 or email me at [bernice.mireku-north@house.state.md.us](mailto:bernice.mireku-north@house.state.md.us). Thank you to those that have been engaged and supportive. A special thanks to my Chief of Staff Zach Levin, Legislative Aide Omar Escudero, Legacy Leader Susan Mize, and Interns Ayodotun Banjo and Nabiot Dube. I am able to continue working for District 14 because of this incredible team.

## LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

I am proud to report that **two of my bills I sponsored passed** this session – both of which I previously introduced last year. I am grateful to my fellow legislators and the various advocacy groups that offered their support and guidance for these bills along the way. These legislative victories include:

**Election Law - Local Boards of Elections - Language Assistance Program (HB983/SB685):** This law helps limited English proficient voters at the ballot box in eligible counties. Local boards of elections in eligible jurisdictions will be required to translate online voting materials, offer real-time translation services via videoconference at polling places, post signage at polling places in the designated languages notifying voters that language assistance is available, and make reasonable efforts to recruit bilingual election judges.

**Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations (HB185/SB359):** This law will secure \$3.7 million for each Fiscal Year 2027 through 2029 for child care programs tending to children, from birth to age 6, with developmental or physical disabilities and are delayed in emotional, behavioral or social functioning. The therapeutic child care for these children prepares them to matriculate to a traditional school environment. This law will help working families with young children looking for child care that better tend to the needs of their disabled or delayed child.

## **PUSHING NEW POLICIES**

I was proud to advocate for other pieces of legislation, which did not pass in time before the end of session, and will be assessing whether to move forward with them next year:

**Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act (HB387):** This legislation would create an 11% excise tax on firearm dealers derived from their firearm sales. The revenue from this new tax would go towards funding the prevention and treatment of gun violence, including the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program, Survivors of Homicide Victims Grant Program, Center for

Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention, trauma centers, and the Coordinated Community Supports Partnership Fund for youth mental health support in schools. The bill was heard in the House Ways and Means committee but was not scheduled for a vote.

**Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact (HB118):** This bill would make Maryland a member of the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact to address our teacher shortage. This bill was also a priority of the Legislative Black Caucus to retain more diverse teachers. Being a member of the Compact would allow teachers licensed in another compact member state to be granted an equivalent license in Maryland. The Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact was also considered in the initial version of the Governor's Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act (HB504). Even though the Compact was not considered this year, work will begin to start a National Teacher Recruitment Campaign to bring licensed and prospective teachers to Maryland and to establish the Maryland Teacher Relocation Incentive Grant to recruit out of state teachers.

**Child Care Centers - Teacher Qualifications - Alterations (HB1303):** This bill would expand opportunities to enter into the child care workforce by creating a new pathway for qualified individuals to become child care teachers when they lack formal documentation of their education. This reform is especially important for refugees who often can't access their documents from their home country. This bill passed the House of Delegates but was not scheduled for a vote in the Senate.

**Unhoused Individuals - Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense (HB487/SB484):** This bill was introduced as a response to the Supreme Court decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, which stated that it is not cruel and unusual punishment to jail or otherwise penalize someone for sleeping on public land. This bill would ensure that unhoused individuals have basic rights to life-sustaining activities – like eating, drinking, or resting on public land. This bill was heard in the House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committees but was not scheduled for a vote.

**Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals (HB837):** This bill would create a task force of legislators and experts to study and make legislative recommendations to reduce forced infant separation in Maryland's prisons and promote bonding between incarcerated mothers and their children. The bill was heard before the House Judiciary committee but was not scheduled for a vote.

**School Psychologist Interstate Licensure Compact (HB959):** This legislation would enter Maryland into the School Psychologist Interstate Licensure Compact, which permits licensed school psychologists to move freely between member states and apply for school psychologist positions without needing to be re-licensed. This bill was heard in the House Ways and Means committee but was not scheduled for a vote.

## **DISTRICT 14 BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS**

<b><u>Education &amp; Transportation</u></b>	<b><u>Parks, Recreation, and Land Preservation</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bowie Mill Bike Trail - \$6,000,000</li><li>• Route 108 Crosswalks - \$120,000</li><li>• Clarksburg Library - \$20,000</li><li>• Sandy Spring Museum Library Archives - \$200,000</li><li>• James Hubert Blake High School - \$1,000,000</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Damascus Heritage Society Museum - \$100,000</li><li>• Calverton Galway Local Park - \$275,000</li><li>• Damascus High School Athletic Facility - \$200,000</li><li>• Girl Scout Camp at Brighton Woods - \$400,000</li><li>• Sherwood High School Softball Field - \$686,000</li><li>• Freedman's State Park - \$2,000,000</li></ul>

<b><u>Housing &amp; Community Development</u></b>	<b><u>Public Safety</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damascus Main Street - \$50,000</li> <li>• Friends House Retirement Community - \$100,000</li> <li>• Muslim Community Center Community Kitchen - \$30,000</li> <li>• Olney Community Hub - \$5,200,000</li> <li>• Olney Mill House - \$172,000</li> <li>• Olney Rotary Club - \$50,000</li> <li>• Friends House ArtSpaces - \$50,000</li> <li>• Olney Farmers and Artist Market - \$5,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laytonsville District Volunteer Fire Station - \$100,000</li> <li>• Sandy Spring Volunteer Fire Department - \$100,000</li> </ul>

## IMPORTANT BILLS THAT PASSED THIS YEAR

### **Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Package**

This year, we faced immense challenges imposed by a state budget deficit, federal funding cuts, and an unstable economy. To understand the decisions the House and Senate have made for this year's budget, it's important to understand the circumstances that led us here.

- **Structural Challenges:** National economic volatility, in conjunction with the shifting landscape of Maryland's economy, led us to believe that we could run into issues with Maryland's budget sooner rather than later. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic started, we began to receive an influx in federal spending, creating a temporary surplus that we used to delay a potential shortfall. In 2023, the national economy began to recover from high inflation but inflation still remained higher than pre-pandemic levels. This contributed to rising expenses in healthcare, cost of living, higher education, and more which drained state funds, leading to the budget deficit we see today.
- **Changes in the Federal Administration:** These structural challenges, paired with the current presidential administration slashing federal spending on everything from federal departments and jobs, deals with federal contractors, and allocations to state resources, have long reaching implications for Maryland's workforce and economy.

Hundreds of thousands of Maryland residents previously or currently employed by the federal government were impacted. Up until the start of the new presidential administration, one out of every ten Marylanders worked for the federal government, and they made up a sizable portion of our state's payroll and income tax. This is critical as this tax revenue is used for Maryland's general fund, which contributes to everything from transportation to infrastructure and education. The mass layoffs, in conjunction with concerns over potential cuts to federal funding to state governments, create significant and pressing challenges to Maryland's economy.

The policies that we voted for in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget respond to these internal and external pressures head-on, while upholding our responsibility to pass a balanced budget. Here is what we are doing for Marylanders through the budget:

**A Strong Fiscal Foundation through Responsible and Sustainable Budgeting:** We were committed to eliminating our \$3 billion deficit by significantly reducing spending by \$1.6 billion, reducing our special fund spending by \$298 million and abolishing 364 new or vacant State positions. We sought to preserve strong reserves against the impact of federal action with \$2.4 billion in reserves, including \$2.1 billion in our Rainy Day Fund. We ended the session exceeding expectations with a \$317 million general fund balance and \$7 million structural surplus, thanks to spending reductions and the new streams of revenue, generating \$1.2 billion, that passed in the General Assembly. Those streams of revenue include:

- **Modernizing How We Tax:** Changing the income tax brackets so that 94% of tax filers will pay the same or less under the new income tax structure.
- **Income Tax Adjustments:** The standard deduction will increase by 20%, reducing taxable income for many residents. Itemized deductions such as mortgage interest and charitable donations will gradually phase out for incomes exceeding \$200,000. Higher earners will see slight increases through new tax brackets. The Child Tax Credit will now gradually decrease for higher-income families, instead of cutting off at \$15,000. Overall, the vast majority of Marylanders will see no tax changes, as the higher standard deduction will offset these alterations for most families.
- **Additional Revenue Initiatives:** A 2% surcharge will be applied to capital gains income over \$350,000. The tax on sports wagering will increase from 15% to 20%. A 3% sales

tax will be applied to data and IT services. The tax on cannabis sales will rise from 9% to 12%. A 6% sales tax will now apply to vending machine purchases. The cap on Maryland's film production tax credit will be reduced from \$20 million to \$12 million. The maximum local income tax rate will increase from 3.2% to 3.3%, providing counties the option to raise additional local revenue if necessary.

- **Transportation Revenue Adjustments:** An extra \$500 million raised to address the State's long-term infrastructure needs through measures like adjusting the vehicle excise tax to 6.5%, adjusting the certificate of title fees, a new rental vehicle excise tax of 3.5%, establishing a \$5 fee on new tire purchase, accelerating registration fee increases, revising historic tag rules, and increasing the maximum Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program fee from \$14 to \$30.

**Preserving Vital Funding:** In light of our budget challenges, several programs were considered for potential cuts, but following rigorous debate in the General Assembly and the tireless advocacy of community activists, funding was ultimately preserved. Our budget maintains \$15 million in investment for cancer research at our Academic Health Centers, nearly \$11 million for crime victim grants, and \$7 million for grants to local governments for enterprise zone tax credits. We have also continued our ongoing mandates for public television, the arts council, and Baltimore City Community College.

**Investing in Growth and Community Services:** We are making important investments in our future. A total of \$139 million will boost our private-sector economy, including \$27.5 million to make Maryland the Capital of Quantum, \$38 million for Tradepoint Atlantic, \$16 million for the Sunny Day Fund, and \$10 million for the Strategic Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund. Health care remains strong, as \$181.5 million is added for community services for the developmentally disabled, \$15.6 billion is allocated to Medicaid, covering about 1.5 million residents, along with a 1% rate increase for providers serving the developmentally disabled, behavioral health providers, nursing homes, and most Medicaid community-based providers. Public safety is reinforced with \$121.8 million for police aid, \$60 million for victim services, an extra \$5.5 million for community-based juvenile programs, and \$5 million to strengthen staffing in the Division of Parole and Probation. Lastly, we are committing \$100 million to our climate pollution reduction plan – dividing the funds equally between solar energy projects on state

land and clean energy initiatives for local governments. We've also maintained historic investment into our education system which is further detailed below.

## **Education**

This session, the House and Senate passed Governor Moore's **Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**(*HB504*). This legislation modifies state education funding, updates our programming priorities, and introduces key adjustments to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future – the state's ongoing work to reform our education system. Now in its third year, the Blueprint has demonstrated significant progress in delivering increased educational outcomes for all Maryland Students. Here's a quick look at our Blueprint successes:

- **Early Childhood Education:** Full-day pre-K enrollment has surged by more than 53%. Since 2021, seven new Patty Centers have opened, and in 2024, these centers served over 700 students, offering free educational and health services to parents and their children from birth to age three.
- **Teacher Quality and Support:** The Blueprint has helped Maryland attract diverse, high-caliber educators. Since 2021, the number of teachers pursuing National Board Certification (NBC) has quadrupled, making Maryland the nation's leader in new NBC earners. Additionally, a 10% salary increase under the Blueprint has enhanced teacher retention and recruitment.
- **College and Career Readiness:** Dual enrollment has grown by 23% just one year after implementation, enabling more students to earn college credits while in high school.

To protect the progress we are making in Maryland education, we made targeted adjustments-protecting every at-promise student and keeping our reform work funded and more affordable by Fiscal Year 2028 through the Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act (*HB504*). Key provisions include:

- **Delaying Collaborative Time Mandates:** In recognition of the 1,500 teacher shortage in Maryland, the implementation of collaborative time now was not feasible. Our focus is now shifting to building up our teacher workforce, as I described earlier in the letter on page two.
- **School Leadership Training Program:** This 12- month long program has two parts. One part is the School System Leadership Training Program, which is for top education



officials, covering U.S. education trends, school redesign, and general best practices. The other, the Maryland School Leadership Academy, focuses on best practices, strategic practice and leadership training for principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders.

- **Academic Excellence Program:** This program ensures that educators have access to professional learning opportunities. Certified coordinators facilitate training that enhance instructional practices in collaboration with local school and county boards.
- **Modifying Coordinated Community Supports Partnership Fund:** The funds have been adjusted to \$70 million in FY 2026 and \$100 million in FY 2027.

## **Energy and Utility Costs**

This year, we received your calls and emails concerning rising energy costs from the multiple providers that serve our state. Maryland's power grid is currently in a transitory period. Energy demand has increased due to the scheduled closure of non-renewable energy plants and the impact of extreme weather. These factors have driven energy companies to increase utility rates, while the state has adjusted EmPOWER prices to help residents in response. We recognize how important lowering energy costs are to you. That's why we passed legislation this session that includes several measures designed to address our energy problem. These include:

- **Next Generation Energy Act (HB1035/SB937):**
  - **Ending Multiyear Rate Plans:** With this change, we can expect an immediate savings to ratepayers of \$40 million.
  - **Increasing Transparency:** New protections under the STRIDE program require gas companies to show what gas pipe replacements and repairs are being completed and why they're necessary for safety reasons in order to use ratepayer funds. Gas companies must also justify the use of contractual labor versus in-house labor to avoid passing unjustified labor costs on to consumers. Finally, this legislation prohibits investor-owned gas companies from using ratepayer funds for non-essential transportation. Any rate increase must be accompanied by clear evidence of cost savings to the public.
  - **Direct Relief for Ratepayers:** In the winter and summer of Fiscal Year 2026, ratepayers will get direct relief totalling \$200 million, estimated at \$81 per

household. There will also be an expansion of funding sources for greenhouse gas emissions savings, which would ease the burden on ratepayers funding it under the EmPOWER program.

- **Increasing Energy Production:** Ten new energy generation projects are slated to begin, some of which may include nuclear and gas-fired plants. There will also be a procurement process for battery energy storage technology.
- **Renewable Energy Certainty Act (HB1036/SB931):** Addresses the two biggest barriers to renewable energy development like solar and energy storage devices: financing and finding new development sites. This legislation includes requirements to create potential renewable energy plant sites when creating new zoning areas, streamlines the approval process for community solar systems, and creates buffer and screening requirements for devices outside of commercial or industrial locations. It also includes several consumer protection provisions, such as mandatory 5-year warranties for rooftop solar systems, requiring expected performance metrics of the system, and creating a new contractor license for installing and maintaining rooftop solar systems.
- **Energy Resource Adequacy and Planning Act (HB1037/SB909):** Establishes a new independent office within the Public Service Commission called the Strategic Energy Planning Office (SEPO). The SEPO is meant to secure information and advocate for Maryland's interest with our regional energy grid servicer PJM, ensuring we have accurate assessment of energy needs for the state and develop ways to minimize its impact on ratepayers. It will develop a Comprehensive Wholesale Energy Market and Bulk Power System Risk Report every 3 years, creating forecasts to assess the wholesale energy market's financial standing, resource adequacy, and long term reliability, and make this report available in a public hearing to determine action and gather feedback.

## **Health Care**

**Public Health Abortion Grant Program - Establishment (HB930/SB848):** Uses unspent insurance premiums to create a public health program to support abortion care for the uninsured and underinsured. Under the Affordable Care Act's rules, these funds can't be used for any other purpose.

**Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for All Marylanders Now Act (HB424):** Lowers prescription drug costs for everyday families by expanding the Prescription Drug Affordability Board's authority to use cost savings measures like setting upper payment limits. Through this, Marylanders will see savings on their healthcare premiums, making healthcare more affordable for all.

**Health Benefit Plans – Calculation of Cost Sharing Contribution – Requirements (SB773):** Requires the calculation of an insured's or enrollee's contribution to the coinsurance, copayment, deductible or out of pocket maximum under insured's or enrollee's health benefit plan to include any discounts, product voucher, out of pocket expense for a prescription drug under certain conditions.

### **Federal Workforce Protections**

**Protect Our Federal Workers Act (HB1424):** Provides financial and legal support to Maryland's 142,876 federal employees affected by the recent cuts to the federal workforce. The bill expands existing funds and accounts to provide interest-free loans to federal workers impacted by unforeseen employment disruptions. The bill also provides an additional \$1.5 million to the Attorney General to sue the Presidential Administration for their wrongful and illegal firing of federal workers.

### **Immigration**

**Maryland Values Act (HB1222):** Creates a statewide standard for "sensitive locations" including public schools, libraries, and government facilities and buildings. Sensitive locations can deny access to any portion of the building which is not accessible to the general public for the purposes of immigration enforcement unless there is a valid warrant in an emergency where necessary to prevent harm. The passed legislation requires government agencies to develop policies to prevent sale of personal and geographic records, and removes the 287(g) agreement restriction.

**Criminal Procedure - U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions and Immigration Enforcement at Sensitive Locations (SB608):** Limits federal immigration enforcement at “sensitive locations” which are defined as schools, libraries, health care facilities, shelters, and places of worship. Additionally, federal agents would be required to inform local law enforcement about any activity planned at these sensitive locations. The bill also improves the U Nonimmigrant Status Petition (U-Visa), which gives safe harbor to undocumented crime victims if they are helpful, or are likely to be helpful, in the prosecution of criminal activity.

## **Criminal and Civil Justice**

**Maryland Second Look Act (HB853):** Allows incarcerated individuals who were sentenced between the ages of 18-24 and have served at least 20 years in prison to petition the court for a reduced sentence. The bill excludes those sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, individuals listed in the Maryland Sex Offender Registry, and those deemed by the court as a danger to the public.

**Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse (HB1378):** This bill will set limits on monetary awards possible for each sexual abuse claim, that occurred in the past and was brought after June 1st, to \$400,000 for state and \$700,000 for private claims. The tough decision to limit financial awards became necessary to avoid state bankruptcy while simultaneously respecting the need to compensate victims. Offenders can still be held liable civilly or criminally.

## **Housing**

**Tenant Possessions Recovery Act (HB767):** Requires landlords to provide 14 days’ notice to a tenant before eviction and provides tenants 10 days after eviction to recover any personal property from the vacated property or at another secure location provided by the landlords. This storage is to be provided without charge to the tenant. This bill will help ensure dignity to those experiencing an eviction and keeps public streets and sidewalks free from the clutter of an evicted tenant’s belongings.

## **Social Equity**

**State Government - Maryland Reparations Commission (SB587):** Establishes a commission to examine how we repair and redress the harm and impact of enslavement in Maryland and make recommendations. The Commission will propose data-driven solutions by examining historical injustices like lynchings, segregation, and the racial wealth gap. Through this commission, Maryland is striving to acknowledge the past, confront the present, and build a future of true racial equity.

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