

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned the 2023 Legislative Session on April 10, 2023. This was once again a productive session for District 29, as I was able to secure over \$39 million in State funding for many important local projects.

The Capital Budget included funding for several projects across District 29, including renovations at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, a new handicapped accessible boat for St. Clement's Island, the preservation of the retired Maryland *Dove*, and further study by the Maryland Stadium Authority of new facilities at Historic St. Mary's City.

I was successful in securing additional funding for a number of important local projects through the Legislative Bond Initiative process, including the construction of the new Regional Agricultural Center, solar panels at Mechanicsville Volunteer Fire Department, and improvements to the press box at Great Mills High School. Bond initiatives were also included in the capital budget for a new Da Vinci Machine for CalvertHealth Medical Center, solar panels for the Bay District and Ridge Volunteer Fire Departments, and improvements for Annmarie Gardens.

This was also the first year in which the General Assembly could add funding to programs in the Operating Budget. Through this process, I obtained additional funds for the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission, and the Historic St. Mary's City Fort to 400 Commission. Funds were also included through this process for the Lothian Grain Elevator. While it is located in Anne Arundel County, I am proud to have supported this funding so that this facility can continue to be a resource to benefit farmers throughout Southern Maryland.

Sponsored Legislation - I was proud to **sponsor and pass** the below bills during this legislative session which will be presented to the Governor for his signature:

Public Safety Legislation

Senate Bill 57 – Sexual Offenses – Crime of Violence and Lifetime Supervision strengthens Maryland's laws protecting minors against sexual abuse and will protect our most vulnerable citizens from sexual assaults. This was the fifth consecutive year that I have introduced this legislation to address inconsistencies with our laws regarding those who commit sexual abuse against children, and I am extremely proud that this important bill **PASSED** during this year's session.

Senate Bill 61 – Property Tax Credit – Public Safety Officer gives local governments the authority to determine which public safety officers are eligible for local property tax credits in their jurisdiction and repeals an existing \$2,500 credit limit.

Senate Bill 74 – Grossly Negligent or Drunk or Drugged Operation of Vehicle or Vessel – Prior Convictions requires a conviction for drunk or drugged driving be considered a prior conviction for the purposes of determining subsequent offender penalties for unlawfully operating or attempting to operate a vessel while under the influence or while impaired, and vice versa. This bill also establishes that a person convicted of drunk and drugged driving offenses is subject to increased subsequent offender penalties if the person has previously been convicted of manslaughter by vehicle or vessel in a grossly negligent manner.

Veterans Legislation

Senate Bill 974 – State-Owned Nursing Homes – Deficiencies, Citations, and Fines – Contractor Reporting Requirements is emergency legislation that requires increased reporting of deficiencies cited and enforcement actions imposed at State-owned nursing facilities. This bill was introduced in response to the recent reports of mistreatment of veterans at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home. This bill is not intended to be a substitute for action to fix what went wrong at Charlotte Hall. However, it is necessary to ensure that major problems such as these cannot be kept from the oversight of the General Assembly going forward, and addresses the need for increased transparency.

Natural Resources Legislation

Senate Bill 10 – Department of Natural Resources – Documents – Digital or Electronic Issuance requires the Department of Natural Resources to make available and issue most licenses, stamps, permits, registrations, or certificates authorized by the Natural Resources Article in a digital or electronic format. This legislation does not eliminate paper licenses but rather gives Marylanders the choice of how they want to carry these documents.

Senate Bill 80 – Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment restores provisions of law establishing a commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license in Maryland as part of our State’s strategy to fight against invasive species of catfish.

Senate Bill 91 – Natural Resources – Apprentice Hunting License – Alterations expands youth hunting opportunities in Maryland by authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to issue an apprentice hunting license to a person younger than age 17 who has previously been issued an apprentice license.

Senate Bill 102 – Natural Resources – Recreational Crabbing Gear – Individuals Under the Age of 16 Years exempts individuals under the age of 16 from the requirement to obtain a recreational crabbing license to catch or attempt to catch crabs in the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries if they use a collapsible trap, net ring, handline, or dip net.

Senate Bill 275 – Hunting – Snares, Traps, and Other Similar Devices – Identification Requirement requires a person who uses a snare, a trap, or similar device to capture wildlife to ensure the person's Department of Natural Resources identification number is affixed to the device. This requirement does not apply to a person using these traps on their own property. Trappers serve a distinct role in resource conservation and helping to control nuisance animals in our State, and these tags will assist our trappers in retaining the public’s trust of the vital role that they have in wildlife management.

Senate Bill 422 – Natural Resources – Black Bass Conservation Fund – Establishment creates the Black Bass Conservation Fund, funded by a voluntary contribution check off block that would be available when applying for or renewing a fishing license. These funds would be used for black bass management, including for stocking bass, enhancing aquatic habitat, supporting responsible bass tournaments, and supporting scientific research related to bass conservation.

Senate Bill 611 – Office of the Attorney General – Environmental and Natural Resources Crimes Unit – Establishment creates the Environment and Natural Resources Crimes Unit in the Office of the Attorney General. This unit will prosecute the state’s criminal environmental and natural resources laws, including bringing and defending cases under wildlife laws and laws associated with the management of public lands and other state natural and cultural resources. This bill will ensure that these cases are being pursued by prosecutors who have experience in this specialized area of the law, and help our local State’s Attorneys, who are currently responsible for bringing these complex cases to trial.

Other Sponsored Legislation

Senate Bill 395 – State Employee and Retiree Health Benefits – Creditable Service makes any creditable service for State employment in the Executive, Legislative, or Judicial Branch count towards determining eligibility for retiree health benefits.

Senate Bill 639 – Historic St. Mary’s City Commission Reform Act of 2023 revises and updates the statute governing the Historic St. Mary’s City Commission following the findings of an independent audit into the Commission’s practices. This bill makes alterations to the Commission’s membership, clarifies provisions regarding their meetings and election of officers, requires the Commission to formalize and regularly review their agreements and operating procedures and enacts guardrails to govern the relationship that the Commission has with any affiliated nonprofits that it works with.

Co-Sponsored Legislation – In addition to these bills, I was proud to **co-sponsor** and work on other important legislation sponsored by other Senators that passed this session:

Senate Bill 24 – Department of Transportation – Financing and Commission on Transportation Revenue and Infrastructure Needs (State and Federal Transportation Funding Act) expands the authority of the Maryland Department of Transportation to issue additional bonds backed by future federal aid for transportation projects in our State. I am very happy to report that one of the projects eligible for these bonds under this bill is the replacement of the Thomas Johnson Bridge, providing the State with a new opportunity to address this much needed and long-awaited project that is District 29’s most important transportation priority.

Senate Bill 327 – Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation - Funding, Promotion, Management, Licenses, Permits, and Stamps will give more access and opportunities for sportsmen and sportswomen to engage in outdoor recreation by providing the Department of Natural Resources with substantially more funding than it has ever had dedicated to resource management. This legislation also provides important clarifications to State law regarding a landowner’s liability for actions by a hunter using their property.

Senate Bill 650 – Public Safety – State Disaster Recovery Fund establishes the State Disaster Recovery Fund. This fund would be used to provide recovery assistance to Marylanders if a disaster occurs that is not eligible for Federal funds, helping our residents and local jurisdictions in times of crisis, such as the flooding in Leonardtown.

Local Legislation – In addition to these bills, I also worked to **secure passage** of eight bills that are specific to St. Mary's or Calvert Counties that were requested by our local governments:

St. Mary's County

House Bill 526 – St. Mary's County – Transfer of Child Support Unit and Personnel to the Child Support Administration transfers the functions, powers, duties, and staff of the Child Support Unit of the Office of the State's Attorney for St. Mary's County to the Child Support Administration of the Department of Human Services on October 1, 2023. Funding for this transfer has been included in the State budget and this bill is expected to save St. Mary's County taxpayers over \$300,000 per year.

Senate Bill 457 – St. Mary's County – Public Facilities Bond

House Bill 219 – St. Mary's County – Golf Carts on Public Highways – Report

House Bill 247 – St. Mary's County – Transfer Tax – Sunset Extension

House Bill 263 – St. Mary's County – Gaming – Senior Activity Centers

House Bill 887 – St. Mary's County – Metropolitan Commission – New Facilities

Calvert County

House Bill 1178 – Calvert County – Length of Service Award Program – Benefits alters the County's Length of Service Award Program for fire, rescue, and emergency medical services volunteers by allowing the County to increase the program's benefit amount by an amount equal to the percentage of the cost-of-living increase authorized for county employees and raising the death and burial benefits available to qualifying volunteers under the program.

House Bill 1174 – Calvert County – Civil Infractions – Prosecutorial Designations