

Gun Bills

Unfortunately, a great deal of this legislative session was focused on placing new restrictions on the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding Marylanders. The General Assembly passed **Senate Bill 1**, which enacts significant limits on where Marylanders can wear and carry firearms. This bill prohibits wearing and carrying at a private dwelling without express permission from the property owner, and dictates numerous locations where the wearing and carrying of a firearm is prohibited, including amusement parks, stadiums, racetracks, video lottery facilities, museums, and anywhere that serves alcohol, including restaurants.

Senate Bill 1 attempts to effectively nullify the Supreme Court's decision in the *Bruen* case, which ended Maryland's "may issue" permitting system, by making it virtually impossible to wear and carry a firearm in public. This bill targets only Marylanders who want to exercise their right to keep and bear arms legally and will do nothing to stop violent crime in our State. I voted **AGAINST** this unconstitutional legislation.

The General Assembly also passed **House Bill 824**, which adds new restrictions and changes the process to obtain a handgun permit. This bill increases initial application fees from \$75 to \$125 and increases renewal fees from \$50 to \$75, requires individuals to be at least 21 years old to be granted a permit, and adds new requirements in firearms training courses. I voted **AGAINST** this legislation which further infringes on our Second Amendment rights as well.

Economy

The General Assembly passed **Senate Bill 555**, which increases the minimum wage for all employers to \$15 an hour on January 1, 2024, a year ahead of schedule. This bill also eliminates the slower phase-in for businesses with less than 15 employees. This legislation also included provisions tying the minimum wage to inflation; however, those provisions were removed by the Senate. I voted **AGAINST** this bill, which is another mandate that raises costs on our small businesses.

Two bills passed this year addressing the need for more economic development in our State. The first, **Senate Bill 549**, establishes the Build Our Future Grant Pilot Program and Fund to provide grant funding for infrastructure projects to support innovation in eligible technology sectors. Under the program, grants of up to \$2 million may be awarded to private companies, nonprofits, local governments, or colleges and universities in the State. I voted **IN FAVOR OF** this legislation.

The second bill, **Senate Bill 699**, establishes the Equitech Growth Commission and Fund in the Maryland Technology Corporation to support economic competitiveness and growth of emerging and advanced industries in the State. I believe that both of these bills have the potential to benefit not only the State as a whole, but specifically economic development in District 29, and I voted **IN FAVOR OF** this legislation.

Taxes

This year, the General Assembly passed **Senate Bill 552**. While this legislation provided some tax relief to Marylanders, it also made the earned income credit permanent to individuals who do not use a Social Security Number to file their taxes, including illegal immigrants. This bill will continue the practice of giving taxpayer money to those who are in this country illegally. I remain strongly opposed to giving Maryland taxpayer money to illegal immigrants and voted **AGAINST** this legislation.

Military and Veterans

I was proud to co-sponsor two **SUCCESSFUL** bills to support our State's military and veterans. **Senate Bill 553** increases tax exemptions for military retirement income from \$5,000 to \$12,500 for individuals younger than age 55, and from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for individuals age 55 and older. **Senate Bill 554** will reimburse members of the Maryland National Guard up to \$60 a month for the cost of TRICARE premiums for health care and dental care plans.

Education

One of the most notable issues of this session relating to education was the future of the BOOST program, which provides scholarships to low-income students to attend non-public schools. The initial State Budget (and as it passed the House of Delegates) reduced funding for BOOST and included language that would begin a phase-out of the program. I voted in the Senate's Budget & Tax Committee to restore these funds and remove the phase-out. The **final budget includes \$9 million in scholarships and \$2.5 million** for additional resources to support students participating in BOOST and does not phase out the program.

Many of you wrote to me to express your opposition to Senate Bill 199 and House Bill 119, which would have imposed new mandates on our local school systems to teach the State's health education framework and other educational content. I am happy to report that the **Senate took no action** on either of these bills, and they **did not pass** this session.

Maryland 529 Reform

Over the past several months, I have heard from constituents and residents throughout our State of the problems that they have been experiencing with the Maryland 529 Prepaid College Trust program. **Senate Bill 959**, which I co-sponsored, **passed the General Assembly** and resolved some of the issues by placing the program under the jurisdiction of the State Treasurer. The bill also authorized the State Treasurer to make payments to resolve claims brought against the Prepaid College Trust.

Prosecutions of Police Officers

In 2021, the General Assembly passed sweeping reforms to policing in our State which have had a detrimental effect on public safety and policing. Unfortunately, the legislature continued with those efforts this year with the passage of **Senate Bill 290**. This legislation takes away the ability of our local State's Attorneys to prosecute all police-involved deaths in Maryland and gives this authority to the Independent Investigations Division of the Office of the Attorney General. I believe that this authority should remain with the local State's Attorneys, who are elected by the people of their jurisdiction, and voted **AGAINST** this legislation.

Abortion

A great deal of time was also spent this session focusing on legislation relating to abortion in Maryland. The General Assembly advanced a package of bills intended to maintain and expand access to abortion in our State, most notably including **Senate Bill 798**, which would add a "right of reproductive freedom" to the Maryland Constitution. I am strongly opposed to expanding abortion in our State and voted **AGAINST** these bills. However, this package of legislation passed, and this amendment will appear on the ballot at the 2024 General Election.

Cannabis

Following Maryland voters approving the legalization of recreational cannabis, the General Assembly passed **Senate Bill 516**, establishing a regulatory framework for the recreational cannabis market.

The General Assembly also passed **House Bill 1071**, prohibits a law enforcement officer from initiating a stop or a search of a person, motor vehicle, or vessel based solely on the smell of cannabis. This bill also places restrictions on areas of a vehicle that may be searched. I believe that this legislation will have a detrimental effect on the ability of law enforcement to protect public safety and voted **AGAINST** this legislation.

Behavioral Health Package

This year, the Senate put forward a package of legislation to address the behavioral health needs of Marylanders. I was proud to vote **IN FAVOR OF** these bills to address this important issue:

Senate Bill 3 – 9-8-8 Trust Fund Funding - to maintain 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for mental health crisis

Senate Bill 101 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Collaborative Care Model Services – Implementation and Reimbursement Expansion

Senate Bill 255 – Public Health – Home and Community Based Services for Children and Youth

Senate Bill 362 – Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics - Established

Senate Bill 534 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023

Senate Bill 581 – Behavioral Health Care Coordination Value-Based Purchasing Pilot Program

Senate Bill 582 – Behavioral Health Care – Treatment and Access (Behavioral Health Model for Maryland)

