

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned the 2024 Legislative Session on April 8, 2024. Despite the State's difficult financial position, this was once again a very productive session for District 29, as I was able to obtain over \$15 million dollars in State funding for local projects.

The Capital Budget included funding for several projects across St. Mary's and Calvert Counties. I am proud to share that this budget includes \$500,000 towards the construction of a mental health facility for Southern Maryland to be located in St. Mary's County to address the behavioral health needs of our residents. I partnered with my legislative colleagues and stakeholders to bring this incredibly important resource to our region. My office worked with Dr. Brewster and her team at the St. Mary's County Health Department to secure additional grant funding towards this project. The operation of this facility will be a partnership with the Pascal Crisis Stabilization Center who has been operating a similar facility in Anne Arundel County since 2017. This expansion into a central location in Southern Maryland will not only support the three local hospitals but assist residents and their families in finding needed wrap around resources as timely as possible.

I was also successful in securing funding for a number of important local projects through the Legislative Bond Initiative process, including needed road repairs and improvements for the community of Longview Beach and a new turf field for St. Mary's Ryken High School. Grants and bond initiatives were also included in the Capital Budget for the Solomons Volunteer Rescue Squad and Fire Department, the Innovative Center for Autonomous Systems at St. Mary's Airport, Historic Sotterley, the Three Oaks Center Homeless Shelter Shower Project, and Historic St. Mary's City.

In addition, I was also able to obtain funds through a legislative request in the Operating Budget for the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC). This funding will go toward the Commission's important efforts to restore oyster habitats in the Potomac River; Virginia leaders and I met before the session and each state made a commitment to our shared waterways and each state was successful in obtaining additional financial support.

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

Senate Bill 7 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Agencies – Positive Community Feedback requires police agencies to keep a record of positive feedback that the agencies receive about its officers and allow the release of that information under the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA). This ensures that police departments and the public would have access to the full picture of an officer's record, not just the alleged complaints which are public as a result of the police accountability legislation of 2021.

Senate Bill 108 – Income Tax – Subtraction Modification – Police Auxiliary and Reserve Volunteers increases the current deduction for police auxiliaries and reserve volunteers from \$5,000 to match the deduction for volunteer fire, rescue, and EMS members of \$7,000. This bill also ensures that any increases in the future will be uniform for our public safety volunteers.

Senate Bill 130 – Criminal Law – Indecent Exposure Within the Presence of a Minor strengthens penalties for indecent exposure within the presence of a minor in Maryland. This legislation changes the penalties to a maximum of 5 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000 in cases involving indecent exposure with prurient intent when a person knows or should know a minor is present.

Senate Bill 166 – Waterway Incident Notification System (WINS) – Study requires the Maryland Department of Emergency Management to study and create a plan to implement a Waterway Incident Notification System that would notify members of the public, including recreational boaters and commercial watermen, of waterway emergencies. This would be similar to an Amber, Silver, or Local Emergency Alert specifically to notify boaters on the waterways.

Supporting Our Local Small Businesses

Senate Bill 32 – Economic Development – Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation – Loans ensures that Maryland watermen who hold commercial licenses from the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) are eligible for the Maryland Watermen’s Microloan Program in the same manner as a resident who holds a commercial license from the State. This legislation also includes provisions to allow oyster shucking houses to have access to a separate microloan program intended to benefit seafood processing projects in our State.

Senate Bill 183 – State Procurement – Prompt Payment of Suppliers ensures that suppliers for State projects are compensated appropriately and quickly. This bill was introduced following many discussions with owners of local small businesses who were not paid timely for their work or materials on State projects; this lack of payment contributed to many delays on the Leonardtown Route 5 expansion project.

Senate Bill 589 – Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland – Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission – Funding increases the State’s annual funding for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) from \$900,000 to \$1,000,000. This legislation also guarantees future State support for this important resource for Southern Maryland farmers.

Veterans

Senate Bill 712 – State-Owned Nursing Homes – Deficiencies, Citations, and Fines – Reporting Requirements was introduced based on recommendations from the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that reporting mechanisms align with the Department’s procedures in responding to any reports or allegations of the mistreatment of residents at State-owned nursing homes, such as Charlotte Hall Veterans Home.

Senate Bill 1178 – Higher Education – Douglas J. J. Peters Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts Scholarship – Repeal of Service Terminal Date removes vague language in the statute governing the Douglas J. J. Peters Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts Scholarship that was denying some veterans of these conflicts access to this scholarship.

Public Health

Senate Bill 117 – Health – Newborn Screening Program – Implementation of Testing will limit any regulatory delays in implementing life-saving screenings for rare diseases and is intended to save the lives of children across our State.

Natural Resources

Senate Bill 207 – Natural Resources – Northern Snakehead – Common Name renames the snakehead as the “Chesapeake Channa,” with the intention of making it easier to market to consumers. This has the potential to increase demand and lead to a greater economic incentive for Marylanders to remove this invasive species from our waterways.

Senate Bill 507 – Special Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Sport Fishing License – Nonresidents – License Fee creates a separate \$100 boat license for sport fishing for non-resident applicants. The \$50 boat license fee remains unchanged for Maryland residents.

Senate Bill 508 – Hunting – Nonresident Sika Deer Stamp – Fee Alteration sets the fee for a nonresident Sika deer stamp at \$200. The \$10 Sika deer stamp fee remains unchanged for Maryland resident hunters.

Other Legislation

Senate Bill 316 – Motor Vehicle Registration – Exceptions for Golf Carts – Authorization allows counties and municipalities to designate roadways under their jurisdiction that an individual can operate a golf cart. This authority has been a priority of the Commissioners of St. Mary’s County for the last four years.

Senate Bill 429 – Corporations and Associations – Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Washington codifies provisions of State law governing the organization of the Diocese in Maryland at their request. This applies to the Episcopal Churches that are located in St. Mary’s and Charles Counties.

Future Legislative Agenda – While I am very happy to report these successful bills, unfortunately like most other legislators, I had several bills that did not pass this year. Most notably, Senate Bill 26 (Jamari’s Law), which would have increased the existing maximum penalties for felony manslaughter by vehicle or vessel, did not pass this year. This legislation quickly passed the Senate but did not receive a vote in the House of Delegates prior to the conclusion of the legislative session. I intend to re-introduce this very important legislation for our community and for the safety of all Marylanders next year.

Requested Joint Chairman’s Reports – Senator Bailey worked with his colleagues on the Budget and Taxation Committee to include formal requests for reports from various State departments and agencies that can be used in the consideration of future legislation. These items of interest include data on retirement eligibility standards for law enforcement officers who have experienced catastrophic injuries, a report detailing recreational striped bass data collection methods, and reports on blue catfish marketing.

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

Senate Bill 1101 – Higher Education – Maryland Police Officers and Probation Agents Scholarship Program – Alterations allows students who receive financial aid from the Maryland Police Officers and Probation Agents Scholarship Program to use their award at a community college in addition to the State’s public four-year institutions. I worked with my colleagues to change this law after learning that only about \$17,000 of the \$8.5 million set aside for this program in the last fiscal year was used. It is my hope that expanding access to this scholarship program will help with the recruitment and retention of police officers in Maryland.

House Bill 805 – Cannabis – Licensee Locations – Restrictions includes provisions altering a portion of last year’s cannabis legalization law that exempted certain cannabis facilities from needing to be approved by a county or municipal zoning board. These provisions are based on and accomplish the same goal as Senate Bill 158, which I introduced in response to the concerns of the residents of the 7th District regarding the potential major expansion of the cannabis facility being built in the Critical Area in Abell. This legislation includes other revisions to the zoning provisions in last year’s cannabis reform bill, including ensuring that local governments have flexibility to establish distance limitations between cannabis dispensaries and residential areas.

Senate Bill 516 – Economic Development – Maryland Aerospace and Technology Commission establishes the Maryland Aerospace and Technology Commission to promote innovation in the fields of space exploration and commercial aerospace opportunities. Representatives of St. Mary’s County government and I worked with the sponsors of this legislation to incorporate amendments which support and grow the aerospace industry, which a key part of the local economy in District 29.

Senate Bill 574 – Sales and Use Tax Exemption – Aircraft Parts and Equipment – Repeal of Reporting Requirement and Extension of Sunset extends the State’s sales tax exemption for materials, parts, or equipment used to repair, maintain, or upgrade aircraft or the avionics systems of an aircraft. This legislation directly impacts St. Mary’s County Airport and the related businesses.

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

St. Mary’s County

House Bill 651 – St. Mary’s County – Alcoholic Beverages – Beer, Wine, and Liquor Tasting Permit

House Bill 654 – St. Mary’s County – Alcoholic Beverages – Nonprofit Performing Arts Theater License

Calvert County

Senate Bill 114 – Workgroup to Study the Fiscal and Operational Viability of Public-Private Partnerships for Calvert County Public Schools

House Bill 766 – Calvert County – Roadside Solicitation of Money or Donations – Prohibition

House Bill 834 – Calvert County – Ethics – Conflict of Interest and Commissioner Expulsion

House Bill 835 – Calvert County – Procurement – Local Preference