

2014 END OF SESSION WRAP-UP

A Balanced Budget that Invests in Education

The fiscal 2015 budget passed by the General Assembly (SB 170 and 172) continues investments in education, transportation, the environment, public safety and jobs, while constraining State spending growth to 3.5% and leaving a cash balance of almost \$900 million. Maryland is consistently recognized as a great investment by Wall Street. We are one of only ten states to have a “Triple-A” bond rating and this budget continues to keep us fiscally sound.

Strengthening the Middle Class

- Fully funds K-12 education (\$6.1 billion), including \$4.3M to expand pre-kindergarten programs;
- Increases funding for public universities and community colleges, including capping university tuition at 3%; Maryland has had among the lowest tuition growth in the country over the past few years, as compared to Virginia (with over 29% growth) and most other states;
- Expands access to affordable quality healthcare;
- Funds environmental and public safety priorities; and
- Supports State workers with cost of living and merit increases, for the first time since 2009, and avoids cuts to retiree benefits.

Preserving the State’s Pension System

The General Assembly enacted reforms to the pension system in 2011 to protect the long-term viability of the State’s pension fund, maintain a defined benefit program and ensure State employees and teachers that their hard-earned pension benefits will be there in the future. This was an important step, as we have seen defined benefit plans dwindle to less than 20% in the private sector and there is an increasing push in some states to shift public sector plans to defined contribution plans. As a result of this reform, **the State now contributes \$1.6 billion each year – nearly 70% of all annual contributions** – to the State Retirement System. As a result of actions taken in the budget, this year, **the State will invest an additional \$100 million into the pension plan** – above the \$1.6 billion that the State is required to invest to sustain the pension system, instead of the \$200 million additional funding we had originally planned. Supplemental contributions increase by \$50 million annually until they reach \$300 million in fiscal 2019 and will remain at \$300 million each year until the system is 85% funded.

Like the mortgage that you pay every month, we are making our mortgage payments and identifying a plan to pay down even more of the principal every year. **No employees are in danger of losing one penny of their pension benefit and the State is fully meeting its obligation to the pension system.** Representatives of the employee and teacher organizations recognize this solution as an improvement over the original budget proposal and one which protects investments in vital programs and the long-term sustainability of the pension system. By setting a specific schedule in statute, we can give the rating agencies predictability that the State will continue to fully fund its pension obligations, balance the budget and continue to fund the priorities that are important to the citizens of Maryland.

Capital Budget (SB 171)

The Capital Budget is the State government’s best job creation tool. The funding in this year’s Capital Budget will create and maintain **14,000 direct and indirect jobs** and another **17,000 jobs** from the \$1.5 billion of local and private funds leveraged by the State’s capital spending, by only funding projects that are ready to proceed and immediately help the State’s economy, including:

- **Commitment to K-12 Education.** \$275 million for school construction and modernizing classrooms. Over the past decade, we have invested nearly \$3 billion in public school construction across the State.
- **Higher Education.** We provide \$369 million in funding for higher education facilities. Community colleges receive \$65 million in FY15 which will fund 12 projects on 9 campuses and will leverage \$18 million of local matching funds.

- **Expanding Affordable Housing.** Provides nearly \$120 million for affordable housing programs and community development projects, much of this funding will leverage significant private sector investment across the State.

Protecting Maryland's Working Class

The **Maryland Minimum Wage Act of 2014** (HB 295) gradually increases the State's existing \$7.25 hourly minimum wage for more than 67,000 hard-working Marylanders to \$10.10 per hour by July 1, 2018. As amended by the Senate, Maryland's minimum wage rises to \$8.00 per hour on January 1, 2015, and six months later, increases to \$8.25 per hour on July 1. Subsequent increases occur on July 1, 2016, 2017 and 2018, when the minimum wage will increase, respectively, to \$8.75, \$9.25 and \$10.10 per hour.

Since the beginning of 2014, thirteen states have raised their hourly minimum wages, including: California, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia. According to a nonpartisan 2014 Congressional Budget Office report, raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 would lift 900,000 people out of poverty and add \$31 billion to the earnings of low-wage Americans.

We also increased the **Earned Income Tax Credit**, (HB 198) widely recognized as one of the most effective tools for preventing working families from slipping into poverty. Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have enacted state-level Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) that "piggyback" off the eligibility requirements of the federal credit. Since 1998, Maryland has offered one of the most generous refundable EITCs in the country – currently 25% of the value of the federal credit. While other states (such as Michigan, North Carolina and New Jersey) have cut back or eliminated support for working families, Maryland has consistently supported – and expanded – this important program. The bill increases State's refundable EITC from 25% of the federal credit to 28% over a 4-year period.

Boosting Private Sector Investment in Maryland

A major focus of the 2014 Session was a joint business and economic development legislative package that draws on the strengths of our State and places Maryland in the best position to compete in the innovation economy of the future. The President and CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee noted that it was "ground-breaking" to see the legislature "come together to support an agenda that is so heavily focused on economic development." According to the President of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, "this package of bills will make Maryland more competitive in technology, innovation and entrepreneurship."

Private Sector Commission - During the 2014 Session, the General Assembly established a private-sector led commission to review the State's economic development programs and business climate. Led by Norman Augustine, the former CEO of Lockheed Martin, the commission will, among other things, (1) examine the strengths and weaknesses of existing economic incentive and investment programs; and (2) make recommendations about the structure of the State's economic development agencies, including interaction between the agencies and the private sector.

Improving Government Responsiveness - Other initiatives that were announced as part of the joint legislative business and economic development package will: coordinate sustained, **one-on-one mentoring to Maryland's entrepreneurs** through an executive-level network and skill development program; enhance front-line, public and private sector interactions through additional **agency customer service training opportunities**; and improve **transparency on State tax forms** by disclosing how taxpayer dollars are spent.

Leveraging public and private sector capital for higher-education research endowments (Maryland E-nnovation – HB 741) Maryland is home to world-class research universities, national federal laboratories and multinational corporations. To recruit and retain top university researchers and encourage further collaboration

among State research universities and federal agencies, the legislature passed the Maryland E-nnovation Initiative to enhance the economic competitiveness of the State and build on existing clusters of research and innovation.

The bill leverages the impact of over \$50 million of State funds by requiring 1:1 matching private sector capital (\$100 million overall program) from the support of corporations, foundations and private donors to establish university professorships and endowed chair positions in specified areas of technological and scientific research. The E-nnovation Initiative will serve as an internationally renowned recruiting tool that will bring clusters of technology and job growth – along with the best minds in the world – to the State of Maryland.

Establishing reduced Tax Zones to support investment around Anchor Institutions (RISE Zones – HB 742)

A new program establishes the Regional Institution Strategic Enterprise (RISE) Zone Program, to be administered by the Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED). RISE Zones are designed to leverage the strength of institutional assets that have a strong and demonstrated history of commitment to economic development and revitalization in their surrounding communities. Beginning on July 1, 2015, anchor institutions may apply jointly with a local government to DBED for designation of an area as a RISE Zone. Businesses in RISE Zones may qualify for 5-year income and property tax credits and priority consideration for a variety of financial assistance and State economic development programs.

Fostering private-sector investment in early-stage, innovative Maryland startups (HB 740) -

Maryland's elite cybersecurity network includes 12 major military installations, 400 federal, academic and private research centers and 50 federal agencies with sophisticated research and development activity. The State, through the Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO) has leveraged \$43 of private sector investment in early-stage, innovative Maryland companies for every State dollar invested through the highly-successful Technology Commercialization Fund (TCF). House Bill 740 created a new **Cybersecurity Investment Fund** within TEDCO to meet the growing demand from the State's cybersecurity industry. The Fund will provide seed and early-stage funding (via strategic investments of up to \$100,000) for emerging technology companies in the State that are focused on cybersecurity and cyber technology product development.

Gradual recoupling of Maryland's estate tax exemption to the Federal level (HB 739) –

This year, with the support of 55 Democratic co-sponsors, Maryland will gradually recouple its \$1 million estate tax exemption to the federal exclusion amount (currently \$5.34M) over a 5-year period, by calendar 2019. The legislature heard testimony from members of the business and nonprofit community as well as certified public accountants about the regional competitiveness of Maryland's existing tax policy. These professionals noted that Virginia does not impose either estate or inheritance taxes, while Delaware's estate tax is tied to the federal exclusion amount. As a part of growing a positive economic climate more in line with other States, adjusting the Maryland estate tax will encourage those with large estates to remain in Maryland, to invest in Maryland to donate to universities, hospitals and nonprofits in Maryland.

Enhanced tax credits to foster economic development– The legislature reauthorized a number of tax credit programs to fuel community revitalization and job creation throughout the State.

- The **Sustainable Communities Tax Credit** (HB 510), which supports the redevelopment of historic residential and commercial properties, has evolved into one of the State's largest economic development programs and has been one of the State's largest business-related income tax credits. This year, the General Assembly extended the tax credit through fiscal 2017, for at least \$10 million for the overall program, and authorizes the Maryland Historical Trust to award up to \$4.0 million annually in credits for small commercial projects.
- **Film Production Activity Tax Credit** - Under current law, approved film production companies in Maryland may qualify for a Film Production Activity Tax Credit equal to 25% of the production costs incurred in the State (or 27% of the costs incurred for a television series). The House wanted to ensure greater accountability in the program by giving DBED more ability to recapture funds and establish multi-

year agreements to give legislators predictability through the State budget process. As part of the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (SB 172), the legislature authorized the Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) to use \$7.5 million in film production tax credits, in addition to the \$7.5 million already budgeted, if the Department, in their professional judgment, believes additional funding is necessary to retain film productions in the State. The film production tax credit has primarily been used by DBED to retain the filming of two television series: *House of Cards* on Netflix and *VEEP* on HBO.

- **Research and Development (R&D) Tax Credit** (SB 570) increased from \$8 million to \$9 million. Maryland's program mirrors the federal R&D tax credit, which was created in 1981 to encourage business investment in research and development activities.
- **Biotechnology Investment Tax Credit** increased from \$10 million to \$12 million.
- **CyberMaryland Investment Incentive Tax Credit Program** increased from \$2 million to \$4 million.

Supporting Education and Educators

Pre-kindergarten Expansion Act of 2014

Maryland was **one of the first states in the country** to establish a public pre-kindergarten program, starting with pilot programs in 1980. Today, public prekindergarten is available to all four-year-olds from families making less than 185% poverty (\$43,500 for a family of 4).

This bill (HB 297) represents the first step in expanding Maryland's public pre-kindergarten programs to provide full-day public pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds in the State. The bill establishes a **competitive grant program** through which local jurisdictions can apply for additional funds to expand and supplement their existing prekindergarten programs. The General Assembly funded **\$4.3 million in the fiscal 2015** budget to fund the Program, which is expected to support half-day or full-day pre-kindergarten programs for **roughly 1,600 children**.

Implementing Maryland College and Career Ready Standards

Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, Maryland became one of over 40 states to begin implementation of a new statewide curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards. The new curriculum, known as the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, is designed to align K-12 educational standards with the state's college and career readiness expectations of students. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, most of the Maryland's current standardized exams will be replaced by tests designed to assess student progress against the new curriculum - the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. Implementation of the new standards and accompanying assessments is a large undertaking and represents a challenge for school systems including administrators, teachers, students and parents alike. This session, the General Assembly passed a package of bills designed to ease this transition and provide maximum stakeholder input as the process moves forward, by:

- Delaying the use of State assessment-based student growth measures in teacher/principal performance evaluations until the 2016-17 school year unless otherwise agreed to by the school system and the teachers' representative, giving educators and students time to acclimate to the new PARCC assessments. The bill also clarifies that State developed evaluation criteria take effect in a jurisdiction **ONLY** if a school system and the teachers' representative fail to reach an agreement on locally developed evaluation criteria. (HB 1167)
- Establishing a legislative oversight process that must occur prior to the State Board requesting a waiver of the U.S. Department of Education from federal education standards. Specifically the bill requires that the State Board seek review and comment from the Legislative Policy Committee on any such proposed waiver, providing an opportunity for broader input. (HB 1001)

- Establishing a formal workgroup to review and provide guidance on the implementation of the PARCC assessment. This 20-member workgroup will begin meeting in June of 2014 and is charged with a number of responsibilities including: identifying how the State Department of Education plans to assist local school systems in preparing parents and students for the PARCC assessments; assessing the professional development and ongoing support needs of teachers and principals related to the PARCC assessments; assessing the technological readiness and needs of our schools; and recommending a plan to meet the technological infrastructure needs of public schools related to PARCC assessments. A preliminary report is due August 15, 2014 and a final report must be submitted by December 31, 2014. (HB 1164)

Public Safety

Strengthening Laws to Protect Victims of Abuse (HB 307 and HB 309). Currently, Maryland is the only state that has the standard of clear and convincing evidence to obtain a protective order against an abuser. This legislation reduces the burden of proof to allow the judge as much flexibility as possible to award a protective order in cases of abuse. Legislation was also passed that requires the court to issue a permanent final protective order against an individual in instances of second degree assault.

Committing a Crime of Violence in the Presence of a Minor (HB 306). This bill gives judges the ability to enhance penalties for violent crimes committed in the presence of a minor over 2 years old – another tool to hold abusers accountable for their crimes. Research has shown that violence witnessed by a minor can significantly impact a child’s development, behavior and temperament.

Reforming the State’s Prison System (HB 173, 174, 175 and 176) – Last year, Speaker Busch and President Miller appointed a special joint commission to make recommendations to reform the State’s prison system. As a result, the General Assembly passed legislation to increase penalties for taking cell phones into prisons up to a maximum of 5 years; allow for polygraphs for correctional staff with direct contact with inmates; and strengthen the internal investigation abilities of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to police itself. We also passed legislation to allow the Secretary of Public Safety and Corrections to deal with corrupt correctional officers, by allowing an emergency suspension without pay when a correctional officer is charged with bringing contraband into a correctional facility and that other personnel charged with bringing contraband into a correctional facility be suspended without pay pending the resolution of the disciplinary matter. The majority of the State’s correctional officers are hardworking employees but, with this legislation, the Department will have the ability to quickly and swiftly deal with bad actors.

Marijuana Decriminalization

This session, Maryland joined 15 other states and the District of Columbia in “decriminalizing” the use and possession of small amounts of marijuana. Under current law, the use or possession of marijuana even in small amounts is punishable by jail time and fines. **While still illegal in the State**, the legislation (SB 364) reclassifies the use or possession of less than 10 grams of marijuana as a civil offense as opposed to a criminal, jailable offense.

Under the bill, a first offense is punishable by a fine of up to \$100; a second offense, by a fine of up to \$250; and a third or subsequent offense, by a fine of up to \$500. In addition to graduated fines, a person under the age of 21 who violates this law even once must attend a drug education program approved by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and be referred to a drug treatment program if necessary. A person 21 years of age or over who commits a third or subsequent violation of this law is likewise obligated to attend a drug education program and be referred to treatment if necessary. Fines collected pursuant to the bill are dedicated to the funding of drug treatment and education programs through the DHMH.

There are a number of reasons states have decriminalized the use and possession of small amounts of marijuana but chief among them are a desire for the best use of public safety resources and the recognition that there is a wide racial disparity in the enforcement of the current criminal offense. Despite comparable rates of use, data show that

nationally African Americans are three times more likely to be arrested for simple possession of marijuana than are whites and arrest records can have a serious detrimental impact on an individual's ability to pursue educational, housing and employment opportunities. In Maryland, in 2011 alone, there were over 24,000 arrests for marijuana possession. Many believe that police and prosecutor resources are better spent on more serious offenses. At under 10 grams, Maryland will have one of the most restrictive decriminalization statutes in the country.

Strengthening Road Safety Laws (HB 1212) - Until the legislature acted this session, a person who caused a serious injury or death when driving while distracted by texting or using a hand-held cell phone usually only resulted in a traffic ticket. Now, a person who kills or seriously injures someone while driving and using a handheld phone to talk or text faces charges under a new crime of up to one year in jail, 12 points on their license and any other applicable criminal charges. This bill, called "Jake's Law," comes as a result of the death of 5 year old Jake Owen, who was killed when the driver of an SUV was talking on a cellphone and struck his family's car on a highway.

Speed Camera Reform (HB 929) – Legislation passed this session increasing oversight requirements for law enforcement personnel and speed camera manufacturers. As a result of these broad reforms, a police officer must endorse every speed camera citation and speed cameras must pass daily calibration tests, which are performed by an independent inspector. Contractors that operate the speed cameras or administer the citation process cannot receive payment on a per-ticket basis and manufacturers must pay a penalty if more than 5% of the tickets are erroneous. Cameras are permitted in school zones with speed limits of at least 20 mph. For 15 days after a speed camera is installed, only warning citations may be issued. The Maryland Police Training Commission will release an annual detailed report of the speed infractions issued by both police officers and speed cameras.

Bail Reform – Last fall, the Court of Appeals ruled 4-3 in the *DeWolfe v. Richmond* case that it is a constitutional right for indigent defendants to have a lawyer at the time of the initial bail hearing. In 2012, the legislature made several changes to the Maryland Public Defender Act to comply with the Court's initial ruling, including requiring an indigent defendant to have representation at the time of bail review, which had to happen at the next session of the court, prohibit incriminating statements from being made at the initial bail hearing and establishing a Task Force to study the entire system. This, however, was not persuasive to the Court so many legislative proposals were considered during the legislative session, at varying scales, to comply with the decision. The House and Senate were not ultimately able to agree on broad policy changes to the current criminal justice process.

Currently, nearly 50% of arrestees are released on their own recognizance to await trial after appearing in front of the District Court Commissioner for minor crimes or because of strong community ties. Any significant decrease in that number will result in severe overcrowding in local detention centers and longer wait times to be released after arrest. Two years ago, the legislature approved the use of citations for minor offenses, which allows a police officer to release someone arrested for a minor crime, with the promise to appear in court at a later date. This has helped decrease the number of arrestees who must appear before the District Court Commissioner, but not to the level needed to avoid taxing the local detention centers.

The Governor's Office will be studying the use of a validated risk assessment tool to take the place of some District Court Commissioners, in order to comply with the Court of Appeals decision, and make recommendations to the legislature next year. In the meantime, the General Assembly included \$10 million in this year's budget for the courts to hire attorneys to represent defendants in front of the District Court Commissioner in anticipation of broader criminal justice reform next year.

Eliminating breed specific dog laws (HB 73) – As a result of two years of negotiations between the House and the Senate to address the consequences of the 2012 Court of Appeals ruling in *Tracey v. Solesky*, legislation passed to address unfair liability on owners of pit bulls and landlords. All Maryland dog owners will be equally liable if their dog bites someone that results in injury or death, if the owner knew or should have known that their dog was dangerous. This new law provides accountability for dog owners without placing undue burdens on responsible dog owners and landlords, and prevents dog owners from being evicted because of the breed of their dogs.

Improving the State's Health Care Delivery System

Over \$93 million is included in the budget for hospitals and healthcare facilities across the State, including \$15 million for a new hospital in the State's trauma network in Prince George's County.

Improving Health Exchange Oversight – Maryland's health exchange got off to a rocky start last fall with multiple software and website failures that caused the State to decide to switch to the system successfully used in Connecticut. While no one was happy with the failures of Maryland's website, earlier this year, Speaker Busch and President Miller launched a Joint Oversight Group of House and Senate members to conduct ongoing meetings to assess and monitor the performance of the MHBE and increase access of uninsured Marylanders to high-quality, affordable health plans at a competitive cost in the private insurance market.

The Joint Oversight Group had nonpartisan auditors review nearly 15,000 pages of documents relating to the initial launch of the Health Exchange in October of 2013 and has also requested the auditors to undertake both a fiscal and performance audit of the Health Exchange that is currently in the planning stages to commence early this summer. In addition, they are monitoring efforts to recoup funds from the initial vendors for failures with the October launch.

Despite the failures of the website, at the end of the first open enrollment, the State enrolled over 285,000 people into private, subsidized and government health insurance programs. The Joint Oversight Group will continue regular meetings to monitor and hold Department officials accountable for the switch to the Connecticut model, the fiscal and performance audits, as well as preparations for the next open enrollment in November of 2014.

Copayment Limits for Specialty Drugs (HB 761) – During the 2013 interim, the House convened a workgroup to examine how individuals obtained specialty drugs from pharmacies, which found problems with affordability, not accessibility of specialty drugs. Complex chronic and life-threatening medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, leukemia, and other types of cancer, are often treated using newly-developed and costly pharmaceuticals. Insurers often classify such medications as "specialty drugs", thereby subjecting patients to large co-pays that can present a significant barrier to treatment.

Legislation passed to keep specialty drugs affordable and promote patient adherence to the drug regimen prescribed by doctors. Specifically, the bill prohibits insurance carriers from requiring a copayment on a specialty drug for these rare or chronic medical conditions that exceeds \$150 for up to a 30 day supply. Carriers have the discretion to determine if a medication is a "specialty drug," but a review board of medical experts has the authority to review and overturn this decision.

Medical Marijuana

During the 2013 session, legislation was passed that allowed for the investigational use of marijuana for medical purposes. Specifically the law relied on the willingness academic medical centers to establish programs or clinical trials to treat patients using medical marijuana. A commission was established to implement the law. To date, no state academic medical institution has expressed an interest in establishing a medical marijuana program, largely due to ongoing concerns regarding potential federal enforcement action.

As a result, legislation passed this session (HB 881) expanding the structure of the state's program in an effort to make medical marijuana available to individuals for whom such treatment would be beneficial.

Specifically, the bill authorizes the commission to certify physicians to treat patients using medical marijuana and to license marijuana growers and dispensaries to create a supply chain for the program. This structure mirrors more traditional medical marijuana programs and is expected to better meet the needs of qualifying patients. The bill takes effect on June 1, 2014 and requires the commission to adopt regulations implementing the law's provisions no later than September 15, 2014.

This structure mirrors more traditional medical marijuana programs, in over 20 other states, and is expected to better satisfy the needs of qualifying patients.

Increase for DDA workers - As part of the initiative to raise the state's minimum wage, the General Assembly also provided for funding increases to community providers licensed under the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). House Bill 295 mandates a 3.5% increase in each of the next four budget years beginning with FY 2016. Companion legislation also passed (HB 1238) mandating the development of a new rate setting system for DDA providers and requiring providers to transmit detailed wage data to the state. This data collection is intended to assist in the development of the new rate setting system and to ensure that budgeted increases are being used to support workers who provide direct care to the developmentally disabled.

Commitment to Protecting the Environment

The budget sets aside almost \$500 million for environmental programs, with a focus on preserving and improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay, improving park amenities, and modernizing local drinking water and wastewater infrastructure across the State.

Designating New Wildlands (HB 296) - Wildlands are areas that have retained their wilderness character or have rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life and are worthy of preservation. They are the "best of the best" of State-owned lands. Once designated by the General Assembly after recommendation by the Governor, wildlands are managed in a manner that is consistent with the wilderness character of the area, including allowing activities like hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, and trail riding. By expanding the number of designated wildland areas in the State, we can ensure the protection and preservation of 65,669 acres of land with unique wilderness character for present and future residents of the State, and also encourage ecotourism to boost local economies.

Transgender Equality

A recent survey in Maryland found that 71% of transgender Marylanders reported experiencing harassment or mistreatment on the job because of their gender identity. Transgender persons are people whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. The Fairness for All Marylanders Act of 2014 (SB 212) prohibits discrimination against transgendered Marylanders in public accommodations, labor and employment, and housing. Several jurisdictions already have gender identity non-discrimination laws in place: Baltimore City, Baltimore, Howard, and Montgomery Counties as well as the City of Hyattsville.

This legislation provides a venue for individuals to, in most instances, engage in mediation through the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, if they believe they have been discriminated against because of their gender identity, much like the protections in place for religious, ethnic and gender discrimination. The bill contains exemptions to cover owner-occupied rentals, employers with less than 15 employees, and religious institutions from employment discrimination provisions. Existing criminal laws remain in full effect, including the crime for indecent exposure, with a maximum 3 year jail sentence.

Guaranteeing Integrity at the Polls

The legislature took steps to address wait lines at polling places. In the last few elections, many Marylanders have had to wait an unacceptable amount of time to cast their vote. To address this problem, the House included language in the budget which affirms the intent of the legislature that no voter has to wait longer than 30 minutes. The language requires the State Board of Elections to study the issue and develop plans for future elections to ensure voters do not have excessive wait times.

A bipartisan effort to strengthen procedures for removing dead persons from the State's voter rolls also passed this session. SB 15 gives the public better confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.