



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

*“My ambition is not to be in the political center. My ambition is to be in the moral center.”*  
- Congressman Jamie Raskin

My predecessor in the Maryland State Senate, Congressman Jamie Raskin, often lamented that his ambition was not to be at the political center but rather his ambition was to be at the moral center - the Marylander I have come to admire most, Frederick Douglas, said that he would “unite with anybody to do right; and nobody to do wrong.” As your State senator I have done my level-best to always be at the moral center and, when the occasion called for it, to work across the aisle to further the interests of District 20. I am proud of my record in Annapolis and I am profoundly honored to have been given the opportunity to represent you in the Senate. I’ll be back on the campaign trail in the weeks ahead to make my case for re-election to the General Assembly but before we get into the campaign, I’d like to provide you with a brief overview of this past session.

The conclusion of the 438<sup>th</sup> Maryland legislative session marked the last time members of the House and Senate would convene before the end of the term. Despite the anticipated ups, downs, and election-year rancor, we made significant progress in areas like providing Marylanders with unprecedented access to the ballot; civil rights; consumer rights; health care; access to education; and common sense gun safety legislation.

## Legislative Initiatives

Every legislator comes to Annapolis with specific policy priorities. I have listed below a few my 2018 legislative initiatives and the final outcomes of those initiatives.

### Expanding access to the franchise

✓ **\*Enacted without the Governor’s signature - [Senate Bill 1048](#) - [Secure and Accessible Registration Act \(SARA\)](#).** Over the past decade, there have been numerous efforts to curtail voter rights and to restrict access to the ballot across the nation. With the passage of SARA, Maryland became the 12<sup>th</sup> state to implement automatic voter registration. The Department of Legislative Services reports that there are more than half a million unregistered voters in Maryland. According to [a report](#) by the public policy think tank Demos, this legislation could potentially register 400,000 new voters in Maryland. A special thanks to my House cross-file, Delegate Eric Luedtke. Delegate Luedtke has worked on this issue for years and led the charge for this landmark legislation in the House of Delegates. Legislation of this magnitude is certainly not possible without the initiative and hard work of a broad coalition of advocates. Special thanks to Common Cause Maryland (especially Damon Effingham), ACLU of Maryland, League of Women Voters

of Maryland, Maryland Indivisible, Baltimore Indivisible, and Natalie Tennant from the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU.

✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 730](#) - No Excuse Absentee Ballots.**  
Across the state Maryland residents voting for candidates for federal and state elections can vote via an absentee ballot, no excuses needed. The same, however, is not true for municipal elections. Senate Bill 730 ensures that every municipality in Maryland is required to provide an absentee ballot to any registered voter who makes the request, no excuses needed.

#### Clean Elections

**[Senate Bill 1035](#) - A Constitutional right to know how money influences our elections:** This past session I was joined by the former Chair of the Federal Election Commission under the Obama Administration, Ann Ravel, in asking the legislature to pass legislation that would amend the Maryland Constitution to create a constitutional right for the citizens of Maryland to know how, when, and from whom funds are raised and spent to influence the State's elections. In the wake of *Citizens United*, it is more important than ever to ensure we know how money is being used to influence our elections, and this bill would have made access to such information a Constitutional right. During her testimony Ms. Ravel said "this landmark measure is a unique opportunity for Marylanders to stand up to the undue influence of dark money... If passed, Marylanders will gain a groundbreaking new right to know who's really behind the money being spent to influence their decisions at the ballot box, giving them the power, they need to vote confidently in their own interest." I could not agree more with Ms. Ravel, and I will continue to work on the issue of campaign finance reform as long as I am in office.

#### Accessible Education

**[Senate Bill 1049](#) - Endowing our future: creating a path toward debt-free college:** A college education provides people with innumerable benefits, including higher incomes, greater economic mobility, and a healthier lifestyle. While a college education has become an essential ingredient to success, the cost has become prohibitive for too many Marylanders. I proposed creating an endowment to eventually provide debt-free college for every Marylander. Endowments are used as a successful tool for capital projects and can be used to ensure every Marylander can go to college debt-free. Read more about my plan on my website in my [op-ed in the Baltimore Sun](#) or in a [powerpoint](#).

✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 502](#) - University of Maryland Scholarship Fund** - In 2013, the General Assembly authorized the University System of Maryland (USM) to create a quasi-endowment to aid fundraising efforts. In 2017, the A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation made a large, unprecedented investment of \$219,500,000 (219.5 million) to the University of Maryland, College Park, the flagship institution of our state. This investment increases college access and affordability through need-based scholarships. This investment was one of the largest ever given to a public university in the nation's history. The Clark Challenge for Maryland Promise offers to create a scholarship of up to \$100,000,000 (One Hundred Million). Senate Bill 502 authorizes a one-time transfer of no more than \$25,000,000 (25

million) from the non-state supported fund balance to the quasi-endowment fund in order to match a privately funded scholarship program at the College Park campus.

### Criminal Justice Reform

**Senate Bill 1050 - Eliminating debtors' prisons in Maryland:** Our Maryland Constitution strictly prohibits the state from jailing an individual because they owe a debt – debtors prisons. The ACLU of Maryland recently published a sobering account of how our civil-debt collection system can lead to jail time for those who have fallen on tough times – noting that “one in three adults in this country has a debt that has been turned over to a private collection agency. Thousands of debtors are arrested and jailed each year because they owe money. Millions more are threatened with jail. The debts owed can be as small as a few dollars and can involve every kind of consumer debt, from medical bills to car payments to student loans. Arrests stemming from private debt are devastating communities across the country, and amount to a silent financial crisis that, due to longstanding racial and economic inequalities, is disproportionately affecting people of color and low-income communities” – and yes, this happens here in MARYLAND! This legislation would have prevented a debtor from serving jail time on a civil warrant should they be arrested.

The editorial board of the Daily Record and the recent release of the ACLU's sobering report “[A Pound of Flesh: The Criminalization of Private Debt](#)” have shed much needed light on this issue and I will continue to advocate for this legislation while I'm in office. Thanks to my crossfile, Delegate Erek L. Barron, and the Job Opportunities Task Force, Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition, Maryland Access to Justice Coalition, and others for their advocacy on this issue. Click [here](#) for the Daily Record's take.

 **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - Senate Bill 838 - Providing a second chance to those who face unintended collateral consequences:** A Writ of Coram Nobis “the error before us” is a petition one files when they face an unintended collateral consequence of a prior conviction. To qualify for a writ of Coram Nobis an individual must demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that there was a constitutional or fundamental error in the court proceedings that led to their conviction. In layman's terms, Senate Bill 838 offers those individuals looking to pursue new opportunities and become positive contributors to society a chance to realize their dreams, despite having been involved in the criminal justice system earlier in life.

**Senate Bill 22 - Modernizing Maryland's debt exemption laws:** We all know someone who has fallen on hard times and may have gotten behind on their bills. In Maryland 60% of personal debt are for medical expenses. Under our current law, a full-time minimum wage worker can have up to 25% of their income garnished for a debt. Put differently, a person making \$21,008 could have up to \$5,252 of their annual salary garnished (leaving only \$15,756 annually). The last time Maryland updated garnishment laws was in 1988, and at that time the General Assembly exempted incomes slightly above the minimum wage from garnishment. This bill simply modernizes our debt exemption laws by restoring the exemption to a level slightly above minimum wage, giving hard working Marylanders an opportunity to make good on their debt.

## Public Safety

- ✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 1036](#) - Making sure domestic abusers know they have to give up their firearms:** Under federal and Maryland law, a person convicted of a domestically related crime is disqualified from owning or possessing a firearm. However, this disqualification is not known by all, and often those who are convicted fail to surrender their firearms. This bill would require the State's Attorney, before a trial or a guilty plea, to inform the defendant that upon a plea of guilt or conviction of a domestically related crime that the person is thereby prohibited from owning or possessing a firearm.
- ✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 1038](#) - Ensuring animal abusers can't have animals:** This bill ensures that someone who is convicted of felony dogfighting or cockfighting is prohibited from owning, possessing, or residing with an animal.
- ✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 1239](#) - Protecting the children of immigrants:** At a time in which the occupant of the White House is particularly hostile toward immigrants and their families, we in the states have been forced to take previously unthought-of and unneeded precautions to ensure we remain a welcoming and inclusive state for all. This bill creates procedures for a parent to designate a guardian in the event the parent is detained or removed from the United States due to immigration issues.
- ✓ **\*Pending the Governor's Signature - [Senate Bill 1218](#) - Ending youth homelessness in Maryland:** One homeless youth in Maryland is one too many. We need to do whatever it takes to end youth homelessness in the state. This bill would establish a grant program to end youth homelessness in the state and to examine the disparities that exist amongst different races, sexual orientations, and gender identity.

[Senate Bill 1042](#) - Providing access to justice: This bill would have opened the courts to claims that a county or municipality has violated the Maryland constitutional rights of an individual. This bill is an important step in making sure we protect the constitutional rights of all Marylanders.

## Protecting our small businesses

[Senate Bill 624](#) - Protecting small businesses during Purple Line construction: As purple line construction begins, numerous small businesses along the route, especially in Silver Spring, will be adversely impacted. Construction may cause a temporary decrease in foot traffic and may cause utilities to be shut off. This bill would grant an income and a property tax credit to these businesses.

## Legislative Priorities

Legislating is a team sport and no legislator can advance an issue without the help of countless others. To that end, there are several pieces of legislation of which I was not the chief sponsor but for which I worked on behalf of. I have highlighted below a few critical pieces of such legislation.

- ✓ **[Senate Bill 185](#) - Investing in public education:** Working in a bipartisan manner, the Senate unanimously passed a \$44.6 billion balanced budget that protected our State priorities

without harming our citizens or raising taxes. This budget maintains our state commitment to our public schools by investing over \$6.5 billion in K-12 education, the largest commitment in the state's history, and fully funds all Thornton formulas and the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI). The state continues to invest in Higher Education to ensure that Maryland's public colleges and universities continue on their path of affordability and accessibility by capping undergraduate tuition increases to no more than two percent.

- ✓ [House Bill 1](#) - Ensuring employees don't have to choose between being sick and losing pay: During the 2017 legislative session, after five years of work, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation requiring that employers provide earned sick leave to their employees. Governor Hogan vetoed this legislation following the adjournment of the 2017 legislative session. Our first act this session was to override that veto, ensuring that 700,000 Maryland workers do not have to risk losing their job because of taking care of themselves and their families.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 387](#) and [Senate Bill 1267](#) - Stabilizing the Affordable Care Act: these bills create a temporary reinsurance program which will help cover the most expensive claims from people insured on the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, ensuring the most vulnerable Marylanders will have access to quality health care.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 1028](#) - Protecting youth from gay conversion "therapy": Conversion therapy, the pseudoscientific practice of trying to change an individual's sexual orientation, has been proven medically ineffective and poses a serious danger to LGBTQ youth. Senate Bill 1028 bans licensed therapists from offering "gay conversion therapy" to minor patients. Maryland joins 9 other states plus the District of Columbia in banning this practice on minors.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 1122](#) - Ensuring casino funds are only used to support, not supplant, education funding: When Maryland voters supported the creation of casino gaming in Maryland they were promised that the money would be used for education. In tough economic times, casino revenues were used to supplant, rather than increase education funding. Senate Bill 1122 will guarantee that casino revenues will only be allocated after other education funding has been allocated. It is estimated that \$500 million more would be allocated for education funding once the lockbox is fully implemented following a 4-year phase-in.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 729](#) - Giving local school districts more flexibility over their calendars: In 2016, Governor Hogan issued an executive order mandating that school systems had to start the school year after Labor Day and must end it by June 15. Senate Bill 729 allows school systems to add up to 5 days onto their calendar in June without seeking approval from the State Board of Education.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 532](#) - Allowing DREAMers to access higher education scholarships: In 2011 Maryland passed its version of the DREAM Act, allowing undocumented immigrants who lived in Maryland to pay in-state tuition at Maryland's colleges and universities. Senate Bill 532 allows all in-state students, regardless of citizenship status, to be eligible for the Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award (EEA) program for low income students.

- ✓ [Senate Bill 543](#) - Banning the Box for Higher Education: Education is the path forward for many Marylanders, but higher education is still denied to many due to a prior criminal conviction. Last year, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 543 to ban the box on the initial college application. Colleges may still ask in follow up interviews, do their own research, or ask about criminal history on the common application. Governor Hogan vetoed this legislation, and the Senate overrode his veto this past January.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 1128](#) - Holding oil companies liable for damages they may cause: The Trump Administration recently opened up the Atlantic Coast to offshore oil and gas drilling, creating a potential for unimaginable environmental and economic consequences. Senate Bill 1128 creates a strict liability for the state standard for companies that engage in offshore oil and gas drilling, holding them financially liable for any economic and environmental damages that they may cause from the result of an oil spill.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 2](#) - Stripping parental rights from rapists: After 9 years of working for its passage, the legislature passed House Bill 1/Senate Bill 2. This bill enables a court to remove an accused rapist's parental rights if it finds through clear and convincing evidence that the rape took place and rape resulted in the conception of a child or children.
- ✓ [Senate Bill 277](#) - Dedicated Metro Funding throughout the state: Senate Bill 277 mandates an annual \$167 million appropriation from the Transportation Trust Fund to pay for Maryland's contribution of a cost-sharing formula shared between Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

## **Veterans Caucus**

As chair of the Veterans Caucus I worked in bipartisan fashion with my Republican colleague and Vice Chair of the Veterans Caucus, Senator Waugh, to convene the first annual Veterans Summit, an unprecedented event that brought together military stakeholders from across the state to develop a veterans agenda. The summit resulted in the development and proposal of over 40 pieces of legislation aimed at making Maryland the most veteran friendly state in the nation. I am proud of the work the veterans caucus has done thus far and I look forward to continuing our work together.

## **Delegate Sheila Ellis Hixson**

As you may know, Delegate Sheila Hixson is retiring at the end of this term after 42 years in office. Delegate Hixson blazed paths for women in Maryland politics becoming the first woman to Chair the powerful Ways and Means Committee and was a fierce advocate for the least among us. It has been an honor to serve alongside her and I look forward to working with you to continue Sheila's example of progressive advocacy in the Maryland General Assembly. Thank you, Delegate Sheila Hixson.

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The legislative session is an extremely busy time for all involved in the legislative process. I want to thank my Chief of Staff, Luke Pinton, and my Legislative Aide, Rylie Shewbridge, for their dedication, commitment, and hard work this session. We were joined by Mihir Khetarpal, a senior at the University of Maryland, budding policy expert, and soon to be law student; Silver Spring native Noah Karn, a junior at UMBC and walking encyclopedia of progressive politics; and Michael Carney, a Towson student and Army veteran, who served in our office as the Veteran's Caucus fellow.

Thank you for the honor of serving you in the Maryland State Senate. I am proud of what we have accomplished together but know we have much work to do to ensure we fulfill our potential as a district and a state. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can ever be of assistance to you in the future.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William C. Smith, Jr.', with a stylized, cursive script.

William C. Smith, Jr.  
Maryland State Senator (District 20)