



April 22, 2015

Dear Neighbor,

Thank you for the privilege of representing you as District 19 Delegate to Maryland's General Assembly. I am proud of the work that I have accomplished during my first year, and proud of the progress we have made in securing a strong economy, protecting the environment, and reforming many of our criminal justice laws. Here is an overview of the recently concluded 2015 legislative session:

The State Budget & Education

The budget for Fiscal Year 2016 meets our priorities without raising taxes, raiding funds or expanding the structural deficit. Passed by the House and Senate, the budget restored \$69 million in cuts to K-12 funding, particularly for Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, which took the greatest budgetary cuts in the Governor's proposed budget. It also restored the 2% state-wide cuts to state employees' salaries, the Geographic Cost of Education Index, funding for services for people with disabilities, and \$4.8 million in family planning services for low-income pregnant women. Our state's AAA bond rating, which is the highest possible bond rating and a sign of fiscal responsibility, is still protected by this budget.

Environment

Marylanders have spoken out overwhelmingly against policies that would increase polluting the air we breathe and the water we drink. After days of debate in the House and Senate, [**HB 449**](#) passed, establishing a two-year moratorium on **hydraulic fracturing**. The moratorium also provides the opportunity to further study the pros and cons of fracking in Maryland in order to solidify a clear direction on the issue in the future. I am proud to

have co-sponsored this critical piece of legislation to protect our state from the harmful impacts of fracking. It's for these reasons that I visited Frostburg earlier this year to talk to the communities that would be most impacted by fracking.

Similarly, the debate over the state's **phosphorous management** tool intensified this session. Legislators agreed to a compromise that would still uphold the standard to limit polluted runoff flowing into the Chesapeake Bay, while allowing for two 1 year extensions that could delay the regulation to 2024.

Civil & Human Rights

The work to protect and expand civil and human rights is one of the most important tasks of the legislature. During the session, the General Assembly debated and passed a bill ([HB 862](#)) that allows a transgender person to amend his/her birth certificate without the requirements of surgery or a court order. This legislation builds upon last year's Fairness for All Marylanders Act of 2014, which prohibits gender identity discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

I am tremendously proud that Governor Larry Hogan signed into law my bill, [HB 456 - Workgroup to Study Safe Harbor Policy for Youth Victims of Human Trafficking](#), which will study the implementation of Safe Harbor laws in Maryland and protect under-aged victims of human trafficking from prosecution. The law seeks to create an affirmative defense for minors that are trafficked into prostitution.

Sexual Assault & Rape on College Campuses

Fighting sexual assault on college campuses and pushing for an affirmative consent standard that protects all Maryland students were my top legislative priorities this session. Working with national advocates, legal experts and survivors, I introduced [HB 749 - Higher Education - Sexual Assault Policies - Reporting](#), which would have implemented notifications on college students' academic transcripts if they are expelled for sexual assault in cases investigated by campus authorities. Although this bill and [HB 839 - Education - Institutions of Higher Learning - Affirmative Consent Standard](#) didn't pass, I will continue to put forth this issue in the General Assembly.

Survivors of sexual assault deserve to know the status of their rape kits when pursuing justice. I am pleased to report that my bill, [HB 382 - Sexual Assault Survivors Right to Know Act](#), passed and is awaiting the

[Governor's signature](#). This bill allows survivors to contact law enforcement about the status of their rape kit without compromising an ongoing investigation or revealing identifiable information about the perpetrator. ([Click here](#) to listen to today's NPR story on rape and sexual assault legislation during Maryland's 2015 session.)

Criminal Justice Reforms

False Claims Act

This bill, modeled after President Barack Obama's Federal False Claims Act, addresses waste, fraud, and abuse. Passed by the House and Senate, [HB 405](#) allows a third party standing to bring forth practices that cheat the state and taxpayers. Upon review, the Office of the Attorney General will take up the case and pursue a civil suit against the accused. The state would then be able to recover up to treble damages, and would give a certain percentage to the party that brought forth the case.

Civil Asset Forfeiture

Current Maryland law allows law enforcement to seize any assets, including cash, during a traffic stop. Under a low standard of evidence, a police officer that stops an individual for a traffic violation or at a checkpoint could arguably have reason to believe that the valuables or cash are drug related, and for those reasons lawfully take someone's money without even being found guilty of any charge. The House and Senate passed [HB 360](#), a bill I lead-sponsored with Judiciary Committee Chairman Joseph Vallario Jr., which requires the state to prove that the cash and assets found during a traffic stop are in fact crime-related.

Marijuana Decriminalization, Probation & Parole Reform

We successfully passed [HB 105 - Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and Marijuana](#), which closes gaps in our law resulting from last year's marijuana decriminalization law. This bill makes the possession of marijuana paraphernalia a civil offense in a situation involving the use and possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana. Additionally, the General Assembly passed a bill that allowed the expungement and review of someone's record for a crime that is no longer a crime, but rather, a civil offense (i.e. possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana).

We have identified a problem of mass incarceration in the United States. The House and Senate took on this issue and passed [HB 124 - Criminal Procedure - Expungement - Conviction of a Crime that is no Longer a Crime](#) to reform violations of parole or probation that contribute to

recidivism. This includes the exemption of possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana as a violation for parole or probation. This exemption would preclude someone from being re-institutionalized, except for when the original violation was drug related.

Voting Rights & Re-entry of Ex-Offenders

There is no greater impact to the dismantling of a democracy than the act of suppressing the vote of the most vulnerable members of society. [**HB 980 - Election Law - Voting Rights - Ex-Felons**](#) allows former offenders who have completed their sentence, parole or probation to return to society with his/her voting rights intact. For communities of color, this bill, passed by the General Assembly, will have a significant impact since more than 60 percent of people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities, according to The Sentencing Project.

For more than a decade, the General Assembly has also debated the idea of providing ex-offenders with a "second chance" to re-enter society with the ability to seek employment and contribute to their communities without fearing differential treatment because of their record. [**The Second Chance Act**](#) remedies that – it expunges all non-violent misdemeanor convictions on an individual's record.

Public Health & Workers Rights

As part of Governor Hogan's list of priorities, the General Assembly seriously considered the rising use of **heroin** and heroin-related deaths across the state. There have been a number of bills introduced this session to address the issue through treatment and rehabilitation, and the criminal justice system. In order to incentivize reporting without the fear of prosecution for possession of a Schedule I substance and/or paraphernalia, the House passed a Good Samaritan bill that creates immunity from charges if someone reports an overdose.

Marylanders deserve the right to accrue **paid sick leave** without losing their jobs. After several years of introduction in the House, [**HB 385 - The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act**](#) unfortunately didn't pass this session. The bill, which includes an exemption for small businesses, would have allowed workers to accrue one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked - equivalent to about 7 days per year. I strongly supported this bill because workers should not be expected to work when sick. Earned, paid sick days are good for public health, employees' productivity and business' bottom line.

Transportation

Restoring funding for the **Purple Line** in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties was another major priority for our delegation this session. The Purple Line project is the result of a decade's worth of research, feasibility studies and planning. We have been fortunate to have the support of many organizations including ACT, Casa de Maryland, and the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. We will continue to send the message to Governor Hogan that our communities need the Purple Line. Pulling the plug on the Purple Line would result in almost \$1 billion left on the table in federal funding and thousands of Maryland jobs.

It has been the greatest privilege and blessing to represent District 19 in Annapolis. Please share your ideas and concerns about our district and state by emailing me at marice.morales@house.state.md.us, or calling 301-858-3528. Best wishes for a beautiful spring season!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maricé Morales". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Delegate Maricé Morales

Authority: Morales for Delegate. Katherine Mullen, Treasurer. Linda Mahoney, Chair.