

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Dear Neighbors and Friends,

It remains my privilege and honor to represent Rockville and Gaithersburg in the Maryland General Assembly as a District 17 Delegate. This year's 90-day legislative session in Annapolis has come to a close, and this letter serves as my annual report on the outcome of the session, with highlights on some key legislation addressing affordability, consumer protection, and defending democracy and civil rights, along with a summary of the budget process that I am deeply engaged in as a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

From electricity bills to gas prices and housing costs to healthcare, we are in an affordability crisis. That's why I focused this year on tackling affordability, protecting essential services, and ensuring that Maryland continues to invest in its people and communities. We balanced the state budget with **zero** tax or fee increases, while maintaining and even increasing investments in a wide range of important programs for struggling families, many of which are discussed below.

At the same time, we also pushed back against the federal government's assault on immigrants, federal workers, medical research, and federal safety net programs, and we fortified our democratic institutions and elections infrastructure from unlawful federal interference.

While I cannot cover every single one of the scores of bills we passed this year in a single letter, below is a summary of several key measures addressing affordability, accountability, and opportunity.

Balancing the Budget: Responsibly Investing in Our Values

Under our state constitution, there is only one task that the General Assembly is required to complete each year—passing a budget. And unlike Congress, we are required to make it a balanced budget. Despite talk of “deficits,” it is *always* balanced. When we talk about structural shortfalls, we are talking about estimates of projected future spending needs and projected future revenues, but we do not have actual deficits.

As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I am part of a small team within the General Assembly that is focused on the budget. I consider the budget to be the most important bill that I help to pass every year, because our budget is a reflection of our State's priorities and values, it reflects our commitment to fiscal responsibility, and it includes billions of dollars of investments in programs and services that Marylanders rely on.

This session we faced a new \$1.5 billion gap between projected costs and revenues for Fiscal Year 2027. This change was driven largely by federal policy decisions that reduced funding to states while increasing demand for critical services. Last summer, the federal government passed the so-called “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” which made severe cuts to funding for healthcare, housing, and food assistance, among other important programs that Marylanders rely on, and federal tax policy changes benefiting the wealthiest resulted in lost revenue for the state. Thousands of Marylanders also lost federal jobs during mass layoffs, further straining both our economy and the programs that support working families.

In response, we crafted a budget that aligns with our values and makes targeted investments while exercising fiscal restraint. We made difficult decisions to reduce spending while preserving core services and long-term stability.

This budget includes over \$10 billion for public schools and \$2 billion for higher education, ensuring that future generations have access to opportunity. We directed an additional \$20 million to eliminate the childcare scholarship waitlist affecting 3,700 families. We also invested nearly \$1 billion in pedestrian safety and bicycle infrastructure, funded the fast-tracked reconstruction of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and provided over \$40 million in safety improvements to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

To support public safety, we restored \$47 million in funding for county and municipal police departments and allocated \$2.5 million for the Governor’s Group Violence Reduction Strategy Grant.

We also maintained critical investments in essential services, including over \$1.5 billion for food security programs, \$14 billion for Medicaid and children’s health insurance, over \$400 million in renter assistance and homelessness support, \$80 million for energy assistance, \$20 million for senior services, nearly \$4 million for behavioral health programs, and over \$3 billion for individuals in the developmental disabilities community.

While no budget is perfect, this one reflects a careful balance between fiscal responsibility and our commitment to Maryland families, especially those who are struggling with escalating costs.

Bringing Home Local Investments

In addition to the state’s operating budget, we also adopt a capital budget each year, with the opportunity for legislators to advocate for state funding for important local government and community projects that benefit our area. I am happy to report that, working together with my District 17 teammates Senator Cheryl Kagan and Delegates Julie Palakovich Carr and Joe Vogel, we were able to deliver significant investments for Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Montgomery County in this year’s capital budget. **We brought home more than \$23 million for local projects**, a highly successful year for our legislative district.

Highlights of capital project funding for our communities include:

- \$9.7 million to complete a new library and to renovate the theater arts building on the Rockville campus of Montgomery College
- \$7.7 million for critical water and sewer projects in Rockville
- \$1 million for Shady Grove Adventist Hospital capital improvements

- \$325,000 for much-needed pedestrian bridge improvements at Twinbrook Park & Dogwood Park
- \$750,000 for the City of Gaithersburg's new municipal complex
- \$950,000 for renovations of the Ring House senior living center
- \$1.5 million for the new Rockville facility of Young Artists of America, a wonderful nonprofit that gives teens access to participate in the performing arts
- \$50,000 for Identity, Inc., which serves immigrant youth in Gaithersburg
- \$100,000 to develop a plan for economic revitalization of Rockville's North Stonestreet Corridor
- \$75,000 to help preserve the Rockland House as affordable housing
- \$150,000 for playground upgrades at Beall Elementary School
- \$350,000 for the Montgomery History Center building in Rockville
- \$200,000 to restore and preserve the historic Lincoln Park High School building
- \$435,000 to Rebuilding Together for the Safe & Healthy Homes Program
- \$50,000 for Gaithersburg downtown facade improvements

We also revived an expired fund to provide \$350,000 more to the Twinbrook Recreation Center.

These projects reflect our continued commitment to strengthening our local communities, even during a challenging fiscal year, and our effectiveness in returning state resources to our district.

This list does not include additional funding secured for county projects that are outside the boundaries of our legislative district but still serve our residents, such as Strathmore, BioHub, and the Sheppard Pratt Rockville School, among others. We also brought home \$54 million for construction projects at Montgomery County Public Schools across the county.

Separate from the capital budget, resources from our operating budget and our Transportation Trust Fund will support millions more in aid to local police, local roads and pedestrian paths, transit, rental assistance, and more, some of which was mentioned above.

Providing Relief from Rising Energy Costs and Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure

Energy affordability remains a top concern for Maryland families. We have all seen our electricity bills skyrocket. That's why we passed **the Utility R.E.L.I.E.F. (Reducing Load Inflation For Everyday Families) Act**, landmark legislation designed to bring down energy costs. It won't fix everything overnight, but it's a major step forward. Once it takes effect, you should see your energy bills drop by at least \$150 a year. And other aspects of the legislation should help bring down energy costs even more over the long run.

The bill prevents utilities from passing along high executive compensation costs to ratepayers, reforms how utility rates are set, shifts certain grid upgrade costs, and requires large energy users, including data centers, to pay their fair share. It also improves access to proceedings of the Public Service Commission that regulates utilities, increases transparency, and promotes clean energy adoption.

The legislation further establishes a no-interest loan program for nonprofits to improve energy efficiency, incentivizes large users to adopt clean energy, reduces permitting fees for residential solar, and supports

competitive funding for clean power and energy storage solutions—all of which will help to bend the cost curve for energy in Maryland over time while also addressing the threat of climate change.

Building on our work from last session, I'm pleased to share that the Transportation & Environment Subcommittee of Appropriations, on which I serve, supported a strong investment package through the Strategic Energy Investment Fund. We directed \$100 million to offset the cost of the EmPOWER program charge on utility bills. This will maintain our long-term investment to reduce energy costs while providing significant short-term relief on residential energy bills. We also included an additional \$37 million for limited-income energy assistance to reduce the financial burden on vulnerable households. Additionally, we allocated \$73 million for highly efficient heat pump installations for low- and moderate-income families, helping lower long-term heating and cooling costs. Other investments include \$10 million for HVAC upgrades in public schools and \$20 million for solar energy projects across state facilities.

We also invested \$42 million in research grants for higher education institutions to keep Maryland at the forefront of innovation, along with \$3 million to the Department of Natural Resources to streamline clean energy reviews and \$24 million for the Climate Catalytic Capital Fund to accelerate green projects.

Protecting our Immigrant Communities

As the federal government continues its cruel and unlawful assault on immigrant communities, we passed a number of important state bills that I was proud to support as a representative of one of the most diverse legislative districts in the nation. Early in the legislative session, we passed House Bill 444, which I was proud to cosponsor, to ban the use of so-called 287(g) cooperation agreements between ICE and local law enforcement.

In the final days of the session, we also passed the Community Trust Act, which will prevent ICE abuses of due process and protect immigrants who are innocent until proven guilty, while still holding violent criminals accountable, and preventing the imposition of unfair burdens on our local law enforcement.

Additionally, we placed zoning restrictions on the construction and operation of private detention facilities. We expanded the list of sensitive locations where ICE is restricted from entering, and we added protections against ICE accessing personal data. We also passed the No Kings Act, which authorizes civil lawsuits in state court to hold federal officials liable when they violate constitutional rights.

Fortifying our Democratic Institutions and our Elections

In the midst of the ongoing efforts by several states to adopt new congressional district maps, the House of Delegates passed a bill that would have adopted a new map for 2026 and then given voters the choice in a referendum whether to maintain the new map for the 2028 and 2030 elections before the next decennial census triggers a regular redistricting process. However, the State Senate did not act on the bill, so it did not become law.

Additionally, with the looming possibility that the current majority on the U.S. Supreme Court could soon strike down what remains of the federal Voting Rights Act, we passed the Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2026, which enshrines key elements of the federal law into our state law, namely the ability to challenge

local governments that dilute the influence of protected minority communities by tinkering with the design of legislative districts.

We also passed some campaign finance reform bills and legislation to protect polling places and strengthen our Electoral College process in presidential elections. Furthermore, Senate Bill 141 cracks down on election disinformation and “deep fakes.” The U.S. Constitution makes clear that the management of elections is expressly reserved to the states, not the federal government. We fortified the infrastructure and rules for running Maryland elections, which remain secure and reliable.

Finally, we passed the Federal Obligations Enforcement Act, which takes a creative approach when the federal government withholds congressionally appropriated funding from Maryland, allowing the state to withhold offsetting amounts owed to the federal government and to place liens on federal properties in Maryland.

Taking Action on our Housing Crisis

Our state is not immune from regional and national housing affordability and supply shortages, and many Marylanders are struggling with the high cost of housing. This year the legislature passed the Maryland Housing Certainty Act to streamline the rules and the permitting processes to build more housing. We also passed the Maryland Transit and Housing Opportunity Act which incentivizes development and removes roadblocks to housing near transit stations. By helping to address supply, these laws will drive down housing prices.

The budget also includes \$384 million in low-income rental assistance and another \$20 million for assisted living support for 4,000 seniors. I also worked with colleagues to ensure that \$1.5 million in grant funding through the Department of Aging for the Naturally Occurring Retirement Community housing program remains in place, assisting Holocaust survivors and other needy retirees with affordable housing. The House of Delegates also passed a bill to require a showing of good cause to terminate a residential lease, but that bill did not move in the Senate and thus did not become law.

My own local bill, House Bill 1252, passed both chambers; it directs the State Department of Housing and Community Development to provide an independent analysis and recommendations to Montgomery County on addressing the housing affordability and supply crisis.

Ensuring Science-Based Medicine and Healthcare for Those in Need

In healthcare, we passed legislation to improve patient care and reduce costs, including hospital staffing requirements, expanded vaccine access, insurance coverage for critical treatments, and support for mental health services.

We passed the Vax Act to ensure that Maryland healthcare providers and insurance carriers continue to dispense vaccines based on scientific standards that keep our communities healthy, rather than unscientific recommendations from the federal government.

I also introduced a bill to require health insurers to cover treatments for perimenopause and menopause; while my bill did not pass, it was subsumed into a similar bill introduced by the Speaker that did pass, for which I was a cosponsor.

A bill to require that scalp cooling treatments be covered by insurance also passed on a bipartisan basis after emotional speeches on the House Floor about the impacts of hair loss on women and children undergoing cancer treatments. Scalp cooling has been proven to reduce the risk of hair loss during chemotherapy and radiation.

Additionally, despite severe federal cuts to Medicaid and to Affordable Care Act tax credits, Maryland's commitment to coverage will keep 140,000 low-income people in the program who would have otherwise become uninsured. A total of \$14 billion in this budget provides care for 1.47 million low-income participants in Medicaid and the Maryland Children's Health Program (CHIP). Another \$44.2 million funds our world-leading Maryland Shock Trauma Center. We also made major investments in behavioral health services.

Preventing Fraud that Targets Seniors

I am happy to report that my own bill introduced together with Delegate Pam Queen, the *Vulnerable Adult Banking Protection Act*, made it to full passage. This law will give financial institutions important new tools to briefly pause suspicious transactions, because it is much harder to try to get back stolen money than to prevent it from being taken in the first place. This will help protect countless seniors and vulnerable adults from the same terrible scams that targeted Judith Boivin and Jane Dean, who testified at the committee hearing on my bill. You may have seen recent local news coverage of Judith and Jane's advocacy work with the AARP. I am thankful for their courage in sharing their stories to help others.

Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability of Developmental Disabilities Services

One of the most challenging aspects of this session was addressing funding for the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), which provides services to about 19,000 adults with developmental disabilities. The program has grown rapidly in the last few years, doubling from \$1.7 billion to \$3.3 billion, roughly 5% of our total state operating budget. This growth is a positive development insofar as it provides expanded resources for those needing these services and reflects our State's commitment to Marylanders living with developmental disabilities. However, the program is funded through a cost-sharing agreement under a Medicaid waiver between the federal and state government, and as a result, it is subject to a federally imposed expense threshold: the so-called "cost neutrality" test.

The cost neutrality test dictates that the federal government will terminate its share of the costs of the program, now almost \$2 billion, if the average cost of services per participant exceeds the estimated cost to institutionalize a participant. We have come a long way since the days of placing people with developmental disabilities in institutions, and we don't want to ever go back to that. Today, 85% of the participants in our DDA program receive "traditional" services through a community provider, and the other 15% use what is called "self-directed" care, meaning they apply state funding to pay personal caregivers and cover other costs of assistance with independent living. Those who opt for self-directed

care often hire their parents as caregivers, since parents of participants with severe disabilities do not have the ability to hold down other jobs while caring for their loved ones.

Recent analysis places the cost of institutionalization at about \$215,000 per participant annually. For hundreds of participants, though, the cost of DDA services now exceeds \$500,000 a year. As a result, we are getting dangerously close to triggering the federal government’s “cost neutrality” threshold. It would be catastrophic to lose almost \$2 billion of the \$3.3 billion budget for DDA services, so the budget made some very tough decisions in an effort to ensure the long-term sustainability of this important program.

The governor’s initial draft budget proposed to cut \$150 million from DDA. The General Assembly restored about \$23 million – the largest addition of funds in the entire state budget – while implementing targeted cost-saving measures. **In the end, the State cut about \$125 million to save \$1.7 billion.** We are also commissioning an independent expert review of our DDA programs to strengthen their long-term sustainability and to reform the financial operations of the agency.

The General Assembly also passed a separate law to crack down on erroneous disenrollments known as “procedural terminations,” which have been an ongoing problem for families that rely on DDA services. **The Maryland Protecting People With Disabilities Act** will improve the timelines, requirements, and deadlines for eligibility determinations and renewals.

These reforms ensure that Maryland’s most vulnerable residents continue receiving high-quality, community-based care while maintaining long-term program sustainability and federal compliance.

Celebrating Diversity and Fighting Hate

Amid an alarming rise in hate incidents, the General Assembly took a stand to support Maryland’s beautiful diversity. As a founding officer of the Maryland Legislative Jewish Caucus and as an associate member of the Latino, Women’s, LGBTQ+, and Veterans Caucuses, I was proud to vote for legislation to establish Jewish and Muslim heritage months in our State, as well as a new requirement for school systems to report details about bullying incidents—both of which passed. We also included \$10 million in state grants for security improvements at vulnerable houses of worship, schools, and community centers.

Making Progress on our Safety Net, Education, Consumer Protection, Labor, and Public Safety

The General Assembly also made progress across a range of other key policy areas.

After the House Appropriations Committee held an emergency hearing in the fall on the federal government’s abrupt halt to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and urged the governor to release money from the state’s rainy day fund to help feed hungry Marylanders, the Governor authorized the release of \$62 million from state reserve funds to ensure the delivery of SNAP benefits in November. Fortunately, the federal government soon restarted funding SNAP, but new federal law imposes significant changes on the levels of funding and the requirements for eligibility. The State government continues to step in to support those facing food insecurity.

We also advanced criminal justice reform through the Youth Charging Reform Act, ensuring that minors charged with criminal conduct are treated with an age-appropriate response. The Maryland Phone-Free

Schools Act also passed, requiring local school systems to adopt and implement policies prohibiting cell phone use in schools during the academic day.

On the consumer protection front, we passed the Protection From Predatory Pricing Act. Maryland is the first state in the nation to ban the use of so-called surveillance pricing in grocery stores, so companies can't use consumers' personal data to try to maximize what they charge you through dynamic real-time price changes.

To strengthen workers' rights, we also passed the Arbitration Reform for State Employees Act of 2026 and extended collective bargaining rights to nontenure-track faculty and graduate assistants at certain state universities. We also passed the Maryland Worker Freedom Act prohibiting employers from retaliating against employees who refuse to attend captive audience meetings.

We continued to invest in climate resilience and environmental protection, including funding for flood mitigation and agricultural sustainability programs that support both our environment and our economy.

As chair of the Montgomery County House Delegation's Committee on Land Use, Transportation, and Public Safety, I also helped shepherd bills to improve pedestrian safety with new technologies.

Improving Government Transparency and Accountability

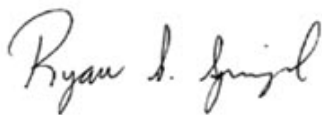
As a member of the Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee, I was proud to help advance a once-in-a-generation package of bills making state executive agencies more accountable to address problems flagged by oversight audits. Among other things, we passed a bill establishing an audit compliance unit within the Department of Budget and Management, strengthened the process for criminal history record checks by licensing boards, and bolstered review of state government transactions.

Serving District 17 Beyond the Legislative Session

From legislation and constituent services to community engagement, my team and I remain committed to serving you year-round. Our office also awards higher education scholarships each year to district residents. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if we can be of assistance or if you have ideas or questions about legislation, policy, or community issues.

It is an honor and privilege to represent you in the Maryland House of Delegates. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ryan S. Spiegel".

Ryan S. Spiegel
Delegate for District 17, Montgomery County