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2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW

Dear Friends,

Representing you and your family in Annapolis is an honor and privilege. Following is a summary of the work accomplished during the 2023 legislative session. We stand adjourned until Wednesday, January 10, 2024.

Delegate Nawrocki passes his 1st bill (HB1096) For all the sacrifices made by the men and women that form all our volunteer fire departments, the bill alleviates their budgets by allowing a property tax exemption on the additional land owned by volunteer fire companies and rescue squads. These additional properties include prospective future firehouse sites and land used for other firehouse activities, such as training. As a result, our first responders should be able to focus more on saving lives rather than endless fundraising. This bill passed both chambers of the House and Senate unanimously.

Delegate Szeliga's work on Healthcare continues As a member of the Health and Government Operations (HGO) Committee, Delegate Szeliga sponsors and cosponsors many bills that pass. She is the prime sponsor of a bill that passed both chambers unanimously to create a retirement license category for physicians (HB453). This will help physicians reluctant to give up their license despite not practicing medicine and assist the Department of Health in calling up retired physicians in case of a health emergency. Other bills include helping you get your prescriptions ordered by your physician without having to try out a few different formularies first (HB785), straightening out the Board of Nursing that has faltered in issuing nurses' licenses (HB611), and a few bills aimed at protecting our community pharmacies from the big box pharmacies trying to put them out of business. Overall, we are working to deliver better healthcare to Marylanders for a more affordable price.

Maryland hospital emergency rooms have the longest waiting times in the country! The HGO Committee attempted to create a task force to determine why and find strategies

to lower wait times and improve patient care (HB274). HGO will work on this before the next session.

Delegate Nawrocki on the Environment and Transportation Committee As a member of the Environment and Transportation Committee (E&T), Delegate Nawrocki brought a commonsense approach to the committee focused on roads, transit, the Chesapeake Bay, and housing. Delegate Nawrocki has fought against bills that tie us to California that requires electric trucks only, which would start being phased in as early as 2027 (HB230). In addition, he has been a strong defender of property rights. He has spoken strongly against legislation (HB684) that would have modeled Maryland to be like Oregon and California, where property owners would have almost no right to evict tenants even for egregious violations of their rental agreements. Fortunately, the bill did not make its way out of committee.

He worked with his colleagues on legislation (HB843) to create a task force to study the Baltimore area's metropolitan water and sewer system, which is continually plagued by dysfunction like the Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant. Also, his subcommittee worked on important legislation for all residents of District 7A that live in mobile home parks (HB23). This bill would allow residents of mobile home parks the first right of refusal to purchase the park as a homeowner's association if the park were to come up for sale. This is a way for many residents to address rising housing costs in these mobile home parks. Delegate Nawrocki fought against unnecessary taxes from his committee, including the Paint Tax that would add a fee to every gallon of paint (HB255). He also fought against another cost for property owners requiring electric vehicle charging stations (HB830) in their homes even if they do not own an electric car - that bill passed. Finally, we stopped an absurd bill (HB367) that allowed the government to use your income tax returns when a traffic citation was issued to base your fine on your income levels.

Protecting Children Streaming child pornography was legal in Maryland until now! Unfortunately, the law had not caught up with technology, creating a child porn loophole. We worked tirelessly with sponsor Delegate Robin Grammer and Delegate Lauren Arian to pass HB233 minutes before the end of the session. This was a priority bill.

Operating Budget This was the first year the General Assembly could exercise the expanded budgetary powers granted to them by the people of Maryland. This allowed the legislature to increase, decrease, and move money around in HB200 – Budget Bill FY24. The General Assembly cut \$1.33 billion from the Governor's original proposal and added \$1.13 billion back in spending. The FY24 Budget totals \$63 billion. It includes

\$8.7 billion in funding for K-12 education and caps in-state tuition increases at 2%. Approximately \$200 million in tax relief is included in the budget, primarily for low-income families. The budget also uses one-time cash to fund "pay-as-you-go" capital projects rather than increase the state's debt. At the time of its passage, the budget was structurally balanced and included \$2.85 billion in reserves, with \$2.5 billion in the Rainy-Day Fund and a \$351 million fund balance in the General Fund.

Blueprint Education Program When passed in 2020, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a massive new preK-12 public education program, was set to add approximately \$3 billion per year to education spending over the next decade. Even before the March budget decline, analysts were projecting a structural deficit in funding for the Blueprint. The Blueprint is projected to have a deficit of \$1.2 billion beginning in 2027 that is expected to grow significantly in the coming years. The Digital Advertising Tax that the General Assembly passed over Governor Hogan's veto in 2021 was supposed to generate money dedicated to the Blueprint. The Maryland court ruled the tax unconstitutional, just as we had predicted.

The future Blueprint costs are sure to require tax increases. Maryland schools are currently spending about \$20,000 per student per year, one of the highest per-pupil funding levels in the nation. We are pressing Maryland public schools for accountability regarding where those dollars are going and why student achievement scores are abysmal.

BOOST The Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) program provides scholarships to low-income kids in failing schools to attend a non-public school. It is the only school choice program in Maryland. Unfortunately, Governor Moore proposed cutting the funding by 20% and phasing the program out completely. We worked with our colleagues to save the program and restore funding. Kids in failing schools deserve an opportunity to attend a better school. We will keep fighting for this program and school choice options for all families.

Electric Cars and Trucks In March, Governor Moore announced that Maryland would move to electric cars only. The ban is phased in over several years such that Maryland will require 50% of the vehicles sold in the state to be electric within the next four years and will have a total ban on the sale of gasoline-powered cars by 2035. We oppose this.

The Clean Trucks Act of 2023 requires Maryland to adopt California standards for selling medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. The Clean Trucks Act requires Maryland to adopt regulations that include the California Advance electric truck regulations, which currently require up to 75% of new mid- and heavy-duty vehicle sales to be electric

vehicles by 2035. This will start in 2026, even if heavy-duty trucks do not exist for various industries. This terrible bill will increase the price of any goods delivered by an electric truck. We voted no.

Minimum Wage (SB555) The mandatory requirement to significantly raise Maryland's minimum wage was one of Governor Moore's legislative initiatives. His bill would have increased Maryland's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, effective Oct 1st and increased the wage annually after that. However, the legislature amended the bill significantly. As a result, the annual increases were stopped, and the \$15 wage increase was delayed to Jan 1, 2024.

We supported the amendment to stop the annual increases and voted against this bill. The surrounding states' minimum wages are much lower; VA \$12, DE \$11.75, WV \$8.75. By raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, there will be fewer jobs for young people. We can already see this occurring. Has anyone gone to a gas station, grocery store, or general store recently to see how many jobs are being phased out by automation in response to laws like this? This increase will reduce the services seniors on a fixed income can afford, drive up costs, and increase youth unemployment. Delaying entry into the workforce slows opportunities for people to get job skills to start climbing a career ladder.

Crime The crime crisis continues to plague Baltimore City. It is spilling over into the surrounding areas, including ours in Baltimore County. Juvenile crime is an even bigger problem; too many kids have been killed by violence this year in record-breaking numbers. We introduced legislation to bring mandatory sentences to repeat violent offenders using illegal firearms. The liberals in Annapolis refused even to give that bill a vote. Every year for at least a decade, the Republicans introduce a bill to make stealing a gun a felony. It is only a misdemeanor. The bill dies on a party-line vote every year. We will keep trying. The majority party also refuses to close the drug dealer loophole that says if someone is dealing drugs and has an illegal firearm, they cannot be charged with the firearm crime.

Baltimore City's State's Attorney Ivan Bates pressed for increased mandatory sentencing for people illegally carrying firearms. The measure did pass. We support that. Unfortunately, the liberals had to put it in a bill with bad concessions. We voted against HB824, which was working to limit your ability to carry a firearm legally. It passed along party lines.

HB1190, Juveniles-Truancy Reduction Pilot Program-Expansion, passed the House unanimously but did not make it through the Senate. This program would have held

juveniles and their parents accountable when they chronically miss school. Fox45's investigative news team, Project Baltimore, reported chronic absenteeism in Baltimore County public schools is currently at 33% and in Baltimore City at 58%. We enthusiastically supported this bill. Students can only learn if they are in school.

2nd Amendment Issues The session started with SB1. This unconstitutional bill will prohibit law-abiding citizens from using their wear-and-carry permits just about anywhere. Citizens licensed after a strict application process by the Maryland State Police to wear and carry a firearm would essentially be permitted to carry only on the private property where they live. Largely on party-line votes, the bill passed and is still wildly unconstitutional. It will be challenged in court immediately. We both voted against SB1 and fought vigorously against it.

The problem with gun violence is not with law-abiding firearm owners. The problem is with illegal guns. We firmly believe Maryland needs a no-excuse conviction for felons caught with an illegal firearm where they go directly to jail and cannot plea bargain away that crime. Additionally, juveniles caught with handguns should face very stiff penalties. That would get guns out of the hands of juveniles and violent offenders off the streets. Our communities would immediately be safer. Unfortunately, the Maryland General Assembly has focused on taking away law-abiding citizens' rights rather than juveniles and felons with illegal guns.

Pro-life Legislation Despite the odds, we have defeated some bad bills, including Physician Assisted Suicide for the 6th time. However, Maryland passed multiple pieces of legislation that enshrine abortion rights, including adding a constitutional amendment on the 2024 ballot that will allow late-term abortions with little to no restrictions. We will have much work to do together over the next year and a half. Defeating an abortion amendment on the ballot will require massive efforts and strategic messaging throughout the state. And lots of prayers.

Maryland is one of the few states with a late-term abortion clinic that aborts, in some cases, healthy babies, including full-term babies at nine months of pregnancy. We will both continue to advocate for an end to this despicable practice in our state and stand up for the inherent value of the preborn.

Benefits for Illegal Immigrants SB552 will give Maryland tax checks to illegal immigrants adding them to the earned income tax credit bill available to citizens. The amount is \$530 for those filing without children and an additional \$500 per qualified child. HB588 will allow illegal immigrants to join the Maryland Health Exchange

insurance program and even get subsidies from taxpayers. We voted against both of these bills.

Taxes A new *Fun Tax* will charge a 6% sales tax to people who rent their private home swimming pool, tennis court, bocce ball court, or any other amenity on an app (SB691). However, suppose that same person rents their backyard pool or amenity without an app. In that case, the renter avoids paying the 6% tax...for now. We voted no.

A new employee tax will be taken out of your paycheck to fund a new Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (HB988). The tax will be 2.4% of your paycheck with a 50/50 split with your employer beginning October 1, 2024. Your electric and gas bills will increase to pay for the proposed wind turbines off the coast of Ocean City. They will be visible from the beach as they can be as high as 975', or the height of an 85-story building, and ten miles offshore. Congressman Harris is working with other eastern seaboard congressional members to pause these offshore wind programs. Largely due to our opposition to the Paint Tax (HB255), we defeated that bill again this year.

Cannabis During the 2022 election, Marylanders voted to legalize recreational marijuana by a wide margin. Legislation for this session needed to be written to implement sales by July 1, 2023. Major concerns came up while crafting and passing the legislation. All medical cannabis businesses will be forced to convert and include recreational marijuana or forfeit their license. The fees are very high to convert all licenses and they cannot be sold for five years. This is the third time the rules have changed on the current licensees, sending a message to businesses across our state that lawmakers are willing to upend their business models regularly.

In addition, this bill requires CBD/hemp products available in health stores, pharmacies, and grocery stores only to be sold in a marijuana dispensary, except topicals. This places products many use regularly in less accessible locations, especially for our seniors. We both wanted to support this legislation but had to vote against it because it had too many problems. Next year, the legislature must return and fix the issues this bill creates.

Senior Citizens We continue to advocate for tax cuts for our seniors to ensure that Maryland is competitive for retirement. Unfortunately, none of the bills we supported made it through. Maryland's tax structure pushes our retirees to other states with more friendly retirement tax codes. Let us keep our grandparents in Maryland! We did support an amendment that would have taken the Earned Income Tax Credit offered to illegals and given it to our seniors instead, but it sadly died along a party-line vote.

Delegate Szeliga is a member of the Maryland Commission on Aging. She was instrumental in extending a durable medical equipment reuse program to Baltimore County. This first-in-the-country program recycles electric scooters, hospital beds, walkers, and more. It is very successful, and you can find more information at the Maryland Department of Aging, 240-230-8000, should you need equipment or have equipment to donate/recycle.

Legislative Bond Initiatives Delegate Nawrocki proposed a legislative bond to support the Middle River Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company with overdue improvements to its firehouse. \$100,000 was approved for use in various projects, such as roof and HVAC repairs.

BCPS Student Board Member Baltimore County Public School's \$2.6 billion budget will now have voting power extended to someone as young as 16. While 16-year-olds cannot open a checking account, have a credit card, or go to a tanning bed, they are now eligible to oversee a budget larger than the Baltimore Orioles' annual operating budget. We voted no.

Public School Health Curriculum HB119/SB199 requires each local school system to follow the state health framework with the penalty of losing funding. The framework mandates gender ideology beginning in PreK and the teaching of explicit sexual acts to 12-year-olds in our public schools. If the state superintendent determines schools are not teaching this radical gender ideology, funding is withheld until compliance. We voted against this in the House; fortunately, the Senate did not pass it.

Taxpayer-Funded Transgender Surgeries A bill passed through the House and Senate in Annapolis to use taxpayer money on transgender treatments for children and adults. Many states have passed laws prohibiting physical and hormone treatments for anyone under 18. We support mental health services and counseling for youth who are experiencing gender dysphoria. We strongly oppose any physical alterations to anyone under 18 and using taxpayer money to perform lifelong medical treatments and procedures on anyone. We voted no.

HUGE Local Wins A local bill in Baltimore County would have allowed limitless speed cameras to be placed on roads at 35 mph or less. This bill was voted down in the Baltimore County House Delegation because of tireless work on our part to point out the weakness of this measure. In addition, we are successfully working against an imprudent development in eastern Baltimore County on the former Lafarge property and trying to preserve land on the former C.P. Crane Power Plant facility. Finally, the shocking news that the Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant would receive, treat,

and discharge toxic waste from the East Palestine, Ohio disaster was met with our immediate and staunch opposition. By fighting together with other local leaders, we stopped this. We are very proud to have been able to protect the community and the Chesapeake Bay.

Representing you in the Maryland House of Delegates is an honor and privilege. Your thoughts and views are very important to us. We are grateful for the people who call, email, and talk to us in the community. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can assist you and your family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathy Szeliga". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Delegate Kathy Szeliga

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan Nawrocki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Delegate Ryan Nawrocki