

A LOOK INTO THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

FROM THE OFFICE OF
DELEGATE
JON S. CARDIN



PICTURED: SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN, DELEGATE DANA STEIN,
DELEGATE JON CARDIN & DELEGATE LISA BELCASTRO



A BRIEF OVERVIEW

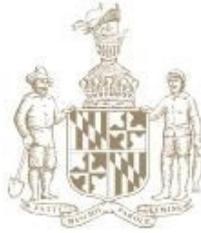
Although 2021 continued to be an unprecedented year for the Maryland General Assembly a number of critical pieces of legislation were passed that I am excited to share with you. This session I voted with the mindset of protecting vulnerable individuals including women, children, and the elderly. Despite the Governor vetoing several bills from last session, my colleagues and I came together to override those vetoes, ultimately acting in the best interest of our State and its constituents. I am proud to have served you alongside my other District 11 representatives.

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DEAR FRIENDS,

After the premature and unexpected end to session last March and months of unease caused by the pandemic, it was unclear what was in store for this 2021 legislative session. But hearing Speaker Adrienne Jones' gavel adjourn Sine Die at midnight, ending the 442nd session of Maryland, I was once again reminded of the resiliency of our great state and its people. It is no secret that the events of the past year defined our legislative session, with COVID-19 relief and police accountability reforms taking center stage in both the House and Senate. Furthermore, legislation that languished due to the abrupt termination was reintroduced this year, continuing the important work from last year, making the successes of this year that much more meaningful.

In March of 2020 the governor effectuated a crucial "shutdown". While this **action was necessary to slow the spread of COVID**, it left thousands unemployed, facing financial insecurity and contributed to a lasting struggle for small business owners. This session gave us the opportunity to provide economic relief for those who have struggled to make ends meet. Thankfully, the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) was able to come together and swiftly pass **the RELIEF Act of 2021**. This landmark piece of legislation secured additional unemployment insurance payments, expanded the earned income tax credit, and provided critical relief for small businesses and struggling Marylanders.

The pandemic has also exacted tolls in ways that are less apparent. The isolating nature of restrictions and quarantine have greatly affected individuals' mental health, underlined by a devastating personal loss for one of our former colleagues and current congressman- Rep. Jamie Raskin. These subtle emotional and psychological tragedies experienced by many Marylanders inspired an act named after the late Thomas Bloom Raskin that **expands access to critical mental health resources through 2-1-1 Maryland**.

As one of our first legislative actions this session the MGA **overrode Governor Hogan's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future**, an extensive education reform bill that will position Maryland as a leader in public education. Yet as COVID continued to shape the way we think about traditional learning, my legislative colleagues and I revised the bill to address disparities made clear by the pandemic. This addendum included additional directives for educational technology necessary to overcome the barriers of online learning.

This year, we have faced the painful reality that systematic racism continues to pervade us. The disproportionate deaths of black Americans at the hands of law enforcement calls for accountability and acknowledgement (Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland – to name a few). Incidents of brutality and discrimination have led to a distrust between communities and the law enforcement officers sworn to protect them, and my Judiciary Committee properly began a generational task of systematic change to grant people of color equal protection. This session, **I was proud to vote for a package of comprehensive reform bills that will target accountability in policing practices**, further ensuring the safety of all Marylanders. These policies are not intended to be 'anti-police' or to create animosity. Instead, they aim to recognize areas for improvement and develop additional protections for both our citizens and law enforcement officers. These bills will save many lives, and as we address the good faith concerns that have been raised by opponents, the fight for equal protection and justice will continue in the years to come.

Despite not passing, there are two bills that should be highlighted. The first, HB212, was intended to expand the 'Good Samaritan' law to provide immunities to individuals who seek, provide, or assist with care in instances of a medical emergency. The second, HB213, protected small architecture and design firms from unfair contracts. Throughout session, I have had the privilege to work with advocates for these bills and look forward to continuing to work towards putting these protections into law next year.

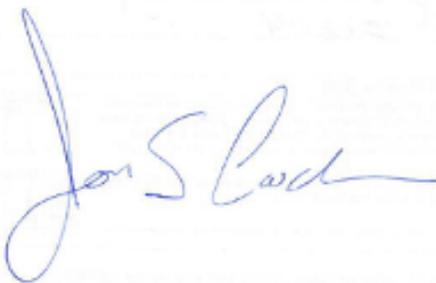
I am grateful to my colleagues for their patience and perseverance over the past year. In the wave of pandemic anxiety, the kindness and humanity we've shown one another is inspiring. I particularly want to thank my District 11 colleagues- Senator Hettlemen, Delegate Belcastro, and Delegate Stein. Together, we worked on

legislation impacting the district, helped hundreds of D11 residents secure unemployment benefits, and successfully advocated for the allocation of over **\$860,000 in capital projects** and millions of dollars in budgeted projects for the district.

Finally, I want to thank all the advocates and constituents who have reached out to me through email and phone. My office received thousands of emails supporting and opposing many of the policies being debated in Annapolis, and some of you even gave your time and expertise to testify at bill hearings. The testimony and arguments you all provided me with expanded our perspectives and were all taken into before I cast my votes. I encourage you to continue to bring issues to my attention as it may inspire legislation for the future. To learn more about how the legislation passed this session could affect you, please take a look at the legislative highlights I've compiled.

While we have done so much, there is still much left to do. I hope you will follow along as I continue to do the important work in the off-session and going into 2022. It has been my honor to represent you this session. In the midst of these trying times, remember to stay safe and please make sure to show each other kindness, understanding, and grace.

SINCERELY,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon S. Cardin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jon" being particularly prominent.

Jon S. Cardin

2021 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

POLICE REFORM

This session, police reform was a main focus of mine, with the goal to make our communities safer and build trust between law enforcement and citizens.

- **HB670—Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021**
 - Establishes Policy Accountability Boards (PAB) for each county which will appoint civilian members to charging committees and trial boards, review outcomes of disciplinary matters on a quarterly basis, and identify trends in the disciplinary process of police officers.
 - Require that law enforcement agencies designate an employee as a victim's rights advocate on matters related to police misconduct
- **SB178—No-Knock Warrant Restrictions and Public Information**
 - Will no longer allow for administrative or criminal investigations of misconduct by a law enforcement to be filed under "personnel records" as it obstructs Maryland's Public Information Act. This will further the transparency between law enforcement agencies and the public.
 - Establishes measures regarding no-knock warrants such as limiting the time they can be conducted to between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m.
 - Requires that warrants must be approved in writing by both a police supervisor and the State's attorney. These measures are crucial to reducing the likelihood that no-knock warrants result in injury or death.
- **SB71—Body-Worn Cameras**
 - Requires all law enforcement officers who regularly interact with the public to use body-worn cameras. Using body-worn cameras in the field will ensure that police officers act responsibly and that they will be held accountable for their actions.
- **SB600—Accountability in Court of Law**
 - Although the ultimate goal is to end police brutality, in the event that an individual's injury or death is caused by a police officer, SB600 allows the State's Attorney to prosecute that officer. This bill works to keep police officers liable for their behavior not just internally with their place of employment but in the court of law.

ELECTION LAW

Over the course of my career, I have promoted transparency and equality in the election process and previously served as the Chair of the Election Law Subcommittee. Easy access to voting remained a top priority for me this session. However, the 2020 election taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic gave legislators a new perspective. The most common barriers that individuals face on their way to the ballot box are lack of transportation or time off work. Increasing the number of early voting centers and expanding access to alternative ways of voting, like absentee ballots, will reduce the waiting time on election day so that working individuals are not hindered by wait times.

- **HB 745—Early Voting Centers**

- Modernizes the state’s formula for Early Voting centers and will result in over a dozen new centers across the state for the 2022 election. This legislation also requires local boards of elections to take into account equity and maximizing participation when placing Early Voting centers.
- Increases the number of early voting centers in certain counties.
- Modifies provisions regarding the designation of the location of early voting centers and the optional establishment of one additional early voting center in each county.

- **HB 1048—Permanent Absentee Ballot List**

- Create a system for registered voters to opt-in to receiving absentee ballots permanently or until they opt-out

PRISON REFORM

This session, legislators not only acknowledged the systemic inequality perpetuated by law enforcement and policing practices, but also the need for improvements in our State’s prisons and criminal justice system. The legislature took action, overriding Governor Hogan’s veto to establish a women’s pre-release facility, passing a bill to end juvenile life sentences without parole, and enfranchising formerly incarcerated individuals.

- **SB684—Women’s Pre Release Center (2020 Legislative Session)**

- Serves to prepare incarcerated women for a return into their communities by providing educational, vocational, parenting, therapeutic and planning resources
- Establishes equal treatment of men and women in pre-release status

- **SB494—Juvenile Restoration Act**

- Ends juvenile life sentences without parole; individuals who were convicted as adults for an offense committed as a minor can be considered for parole after being imprisoned for at least 20 years for the offense.
- Authorizes a court, when sentencing a minor convicted as an adult, to impose a sentence less than the minimum term required under law.

- **HB222–Value My Vote Act (HB222)**

- Provides each individual released from a State or local correctional facility with a voter registration application, and a notation on their release documents that their voting rights have been restored.
- Requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to conspicuously post a notice on their website and offices indicating that a formerly incarcerated individual has the right to vote
- Requires the State Board of Elections to establish a program to inform incarcerated individuals who are eligible voters of upcoming elections and how they may exercise their right to vote.

EDUCATION

Education is the most important determinant of our world's, nation's, and state's future. Providing proper funding for education from kindergarten to college is crucial. Additionally this session, legislators had to take into account allocating money for online learning tools.

- **HB 1372 & SB 965–Blueprint for MD's Future (2020 Session–Veto Override)**

This bill will propel Maryland's education system forward through its expansive reforms. Some of the critical issues the Blueprint for Maryland's Future will address include:

- Increasing pay for educators. Educators are underpaid to such an extent that many obtain second jobs to make ends meet which takes focus away from their students.
- Increasing budgets for special education and mental health services. Both special education providers and school psychologists are overworked due to caseloads 2-3 times the recommended amount.
- Addressing Equity Issues. Schools in zip codes with higher poverty rates receive 5% less funding than schools in wealthier districts. This portion of the bill will level the playing field so that all students, regardless of their family's financial status, receive an equal education.

- **SB 433–Institutions of Higher Education**

- Clarifies the State's formula to ensure that funding to community colleges in the state are calculated equitably and are fully funded in the same way as four-year institutions.
- Provides \$7 million to the School of Medicine for doctors in specialty areas to support better healthcare delivery.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many hardships, one of them being increased rates of depression and suicide. While social distancing and limiting contact with friends and family has succeeded in curbing COVID-19 infection rates, it has taken a toll on mental health. On New Year's Eve 2020, we tragically lost Thomas Bloom Raskin, the son of former MD State Senator Jamie Raskin. The Maryland General Assembly is devastated by this tragic loss and acknowledges that mental health is a crucial issue for many at this time.

- **SB 719—Thomas Bloom Raskin Act**

- Enable individuals to opt-in to receive mental health checkups with Maryland 2-1-1 specialists, who will call to check on individuals and give referrals to mental health specialists when needed. This new feature of 2-1-1 seeks to provide support and treatment before a point of crisis is reached.

- **SB 407—Senior and Vulnerable Adult Asset Recovery Unit (2020 Session—Veto Override)**

- Will bring civil action for damages against an individual in violation of the State's prohibition against exploitation of a vulnerable adult, on behalf of the victim or the victim's estate. This bill will prevent further exploitation of vulnerable adults, and will ensure that victims of certain crimes will be given assistance.

ECONOMIC RELIEF

This session providing economic relief was at the forefront of the Maryland General Assembly's agenda in an effort to relieve financial strain caused by the pandemic.

- **HB 1372 & SB 965—Blueprint for MD's Future (2020 Session—Veto Override)**

Maryland becomes the highest state in the nation for its earned income tax credit, which puts cash in the pockets of low income Maryland taxpayers. Specifically, the credit is raised to 45% of the federal credit amount – which will, on average, provide:

- Families with children up to \$730 more for a total of nearly \$1,700 and on average from nearly \$100 to \$530 for individuals with no children.
- Individuals without children up to \$430 more for a total of nearly \$530
- Unemployment insurance payments will be exempt from the State income tax, keeping over \$225.0 million in the pockets of unemployed Marylanders.
- Marylanders who qualified for the earned income tax credit in 2019 will be provided with stimulus payments of up to \$500, putting over \$175.0 million immediately in the hands of low-income individuals and families.

THANKS
FOR A GREAT SESSION!

– JON S. CARDIN
DELEGATE FOR MD'S 11TH DISTRICT