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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DELEGATION ANNOUNCES 2011 SESSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE COUNTY

ANNAPOLIS – The 32-member Montgomery County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly today announced 2011 legislative accomplishments for Montgomery County.

Among its major accomplishments, the Montgomery County Delegation secured an additional \$40 million in direct State education aid to help fund the costs of another substantial growth in enrollment this year in the State's largest public school system. In addition, the Delegation has already secured \$30 million in State grants for public school construction. About a third of this amount will be funded by revenues generated from an increase in the alcohol tax. Additional public school construction funds will be allocated by the Board of Public Works in May.

The Delegation also secured \$6.2 million for Montgomery College to begin the renovation of the Rockville Science Center East project. Capital funding was also provided for two library projects in Montgomery County: Gaithersburg and Silver Spring. In addition, slightly over \$3 million was secured to underwrite a number of community projects sponsored by Delegation members.

The Delegation also fought to ensure passage of several improvements to the State's K-12 maintenance of effort requirement (MOE). One improvement that passed yesterday will delay by one year any penalty that may be imposed for a county failing to meet its MOE requirement. All counties and local boards of education supported this change to the law.

The State's transportation program continues to struggle under the weight of a backlog of projects and the lingering effects of the recession. Although the Delegation strongly supported an increase in the gas tax to generate additional funds for transportation, the legislation failed. Several fee increases were passed in the meantime that allowed a slight increase in highway user distributions to local governments and municipalities.

"In another very tough year, I am pleased that we worked together to secure \$56 million in State capital funds for Montgomery County projects," said Delegate Brian Feldman, chairman of the Montgomery House Delegation. "On the operating side, the formulas for allocating State aid remained intact. That allowed us to receive the funds we were entitled to given the growth in our local school system and our three community college campuses."

To help stimulate the economy, the Delegation supported an increase in stem cell research funding and the continuation of the Biotechnology Investment Tax Credit. In addition, given the demand for access to venture capital, the Governor's Invest Maryland initiative was also strongly supported by the Montgomery County Delegation.

Other bills that passed with the strong support of the Delegation included legislation that provides in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants under certain circumstances and after years of being introduced but not passed, legislation that allows direct wine shipping to Maryland consumers from wineries. Another bill relates to the troubles too many Pepco customers have experienced with power outages. Legislation was passed that requires the Public Service Commission to adopt service quality and reliability standards to which companies may be held accountable for violating those standards.

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett said “Again this year, our Delegation was faced with a number of challenges. All levels of government are still severely impacted by the recession. Decisions that have to be made get tougher, not easier, every year. Under the leadership of our Delegation chairs, I was pleased how well our Delegation worked together to protect the interests of the County -- and the State.”

“Montgomery’s State Delegation has done its residents proud. We hit the trifecta,” said Council President Ervin. “Passage of legislation regarding the Maintenance of Effort law, school construction funding and holding Pepco accountable for its service is the result of many people working very hard for a very long time to explain how important these issues were to the residents of Montgomery County. We know this is a very difficult year for the State budget—just as it is for the County budget that the County Council is now considering. That is why we are so appreciative for the legislation that our Senators and Delegates have passed, and we want our residents to know that these achievements will significantly impact what we are striving to accomplish in Montgomery County.”

On the public safety front, the legislature expanded the existing ban on writing texts while driving to prohibit reading them, as well. Drunk drivers who far exceed the blood-alcohol limit will be required to use ignition interlock devices on their vehicles.

The members of the Delegation again this year introduced a wide variety of bills to protect the environment. They also provided strong support for Administration bills to establish an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Council, a pilot program for charging electric vehicles, and changes to the net energy metering rules to encourage development of alternative energy. Proposals that would make significant changes to funding for and implementation of stormwater and wastewater programs will be studied over the coming months, in anticipation of overhauls of these programs during the 2012 session.

Senator Rich Madaleno, Chairman of the Senate Delegation, said “The 2011 Session is behind us now, and it’s time to look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. There are positive signs that the economy is recovering. This should improve our ability to help make the types of investments we need to make in our County to ensure it remains the economic engine of the State.”

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ATTACHMENTS