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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DELEGATION ANNOUNCES 2014 SESSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE COUNTY

ANNAPOLIS – The 32-member Montgomery County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly today announced its 2014 legislative accomplishments for Montgomery County.

Although the State's operating budget remained in a recovery mode, State aid directed to Montgomery County will increase by about \$17 million this year, or from \$691 million to \$708 million. Almost all of this increase is for the County's public education delivery system, which serves more K-12 and community college students than any other county in the State. About \$15 million of this amount is for the Montgomery County Public Schools, which will help support another year of significant enrollment growth.

Again, the State will be making some significant infrastructure investments in the County. Although legislation proposing a dedicated State revenue stream to address overcrowding in the public schools was not acted upon this year, the Montgomery County Delegation secured over \$28 million in State grants for public school construction. Additional public school construction funds will be allocated by the Board of Public Works in May. Also, the Delegation is expecting the Governor to request the Interagency Committee on School Construction to conduct a study and recommend funding strategies to address the need for greater investment in our public schools. This puts in place a roadmap for moving forward on this key Delegation priority.

Montgomery College was awarded \$14 million to renovate the Rockville Sciences West building on the Rockville Campus and the Universities at Shady Grove received another \$4.3 million to finish design work to construct a new fourth building. The Delegation secured over \$2.5 million to underwrite investments in a number of community projects. This list of small grants will provide State funds to help support the arts and recreational facilities.

The State will be making capital investments in five of the hospitals located in Montgomery. In addition, the County's Avery Road Treatment Center will receive State funds to begin planning the next stage of development at the Center.

The State capital budget also included the first installment of State funds to locate the new National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence in Montgomery County. With the civil cybersecurity market value estimated at \$135 billion, the County was pleased to have the opportunity to partner with the State and Federal governments on this new venture.

On the education policy front, the Delegation provided strong support for the Administration's proposal to expand Maryland's pre-kindergarten program by 1,600 additional students around the State. Again this year, the Delegation maintained as a key priority keeping higher education affordable by limiting undergraduate tuition to a three percent increase.

Several tax breaks were also passed, including relief for student loan debt and unreimbursed expenses of foster parents. The Earned Income Tax Credit was expanded to help lower-income working families. In an effort to better align Maryland's estate tax with those of other states, Maryland's estate tax exemption will be re-coupled with the federal exemption by 2019. Another statutory change will protect local governments from paying punitive interest rates on refunds of income tax in the event the State loses a tax case pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Delegation members were among the sponsors of several important workforce and economic development measures, including legislation that will phase-in an increase in the State minimum hourly wage to \$10.10 by July 1, 2018. They were also strong supporters of a leadership package that included legislation building on the InvestMD program to improve the Maryland universities' success in facilitating technology transfer from universities to the private sector. Finally, legislation passed creating the Cybersecurity Investment Fund to provide funding for emerging technology companies focused on cybersecurity technology.

After three years of rigorous debate over major changes to environmental policies, there was less activity this year. The Legislature did take action to expand the Islands of the Potomac wild lands, protecting an additional 120 acres in Frederick and Montgomery Counties. Use of Bay Restoration Funds was also authorized to replace failing septic systems with connections to public sewers if that solution is the most reasonable. Fines were doubled for certain water pollution violations and tripled for WSSC watershed violations. Legislation was also passed permitting small-scale renewable energy projects on some property with agricultural easements, requiring recycling at special events, and making it easier to finance clean energy projects on commercial properties.

A number of initiatives supported by the Delegation will significantly enhance public safety. New laws focusing on domestic violence include enhancing penalties imposed on those who commit domestic violence in front of a child, easing the legal burden of proof for obtaining a protective order, and expanding the crimes that qualify for a protective order to be issued. Acknowledging that distracted driving increases risk to safety, the Delegation supported legislation that enhances the penalties for drivers using a hand-held cell phone or texting. The Delegation successfully advocated for improvements to the State's speed camera program that will enhance the accuracy, fairness, and transparency of programs throughout the State.

Despite the Delegation's efforts, the General Assembly was unable to adopt bail reform. Divergent House and Senate legislative proposals could not be reconciled to address the recent *Richmond* court decision which required access to public defenders at all bail hearings. Instead, the Legislature opted to keep the current commissioner system in place and approved \$10 million to support the Office of the Public Defender hiring "panel attorneys" for indigent representation.

A majority of the Delegation sponsored the Fairness for All Marylanders Act, which will extend antidiscrimination protection to transgendered persons statewide. Currently protection only exists in Baltimore, Howard, and Montgomery counties and Baltimore City. Other legislation introduced by Montgomery County legislators is designed to protect elderly people from fraud, exploitation, and financial abuse.

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ATTACHMENTS