

# **2019 Mid-Session Legislative Priorities**



**Howard County Executive Calvin Ball**

**March 2019**



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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### March 2019

Enclosed you will find a brief overview of the County's legislative priorities for the remaining half of the 2019 Maryland General Assembly Session.

Aligning with proposed efforts in the State legislature, my agenda includes prioritizing funding for education and capital projects, expanding access to economic opportunity, increasing public safety measures and meeting the needs of our community.

By collaborating with local, State and Federal partners, we can mitigate the challenges many communities face. Through local initiatives and statewide policy, I believe we can fund our educational needs, expand our small businesses, create and sustain employment opportunities, encourage upward mobility and secure vital services for our most vulnerable residents. These are the issues that transcend party lines, geographical boundaries and socioeconomics.

Amidst our changing demographics and challenging fiscal times, I look forward to working with our local, State and Federal allies to secure funding for the initiatives that will improve the lives of Howard County residents and provide the resources needed for our community to thrive. Over the next four years, I plan to strengthen and expand our relationships, not only within government, but also regional partners and agencies who have a joint, vested interest in the success of Howard County. Together, the accomplishments we achieve will ensure the growth and prosperity of our county.

It is an honor to serve as your County Executive and I will continue to prioritize and advocate for the interests of Howard County. I look forward to your partnership and sustaining support.

**Calvin Ball**  
**Howard County Executive**



## EDUCATION

### *Obtaining Funding for our School Priorities*

Established in 2016, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education ([Kirwan Commission](#)) has examined and evaluated funding formulas and achievement gaps in our k-12 schools across the state. The county is encouraged and supportive of the recently released interim report which includes policy recommendations and proposed funding formulas. It is critical to enrich the lives of our growing and diverse population so that every student can develop the life skills they need to succeed in an equitable environment. While both necessary and aspirational, Kirwan recommendations, outlined in [SB 1030](#) | [HB 1413](#) rely heavily on state and county collaboration for funding. The following work groups were tasked with developing policy recommendations in the following areas:

- 1) [Early Childhood Education](#): Provide strong supports for children and their families: Expands high-quality pre-K to four-year-olds based on a sliding scale and gradually phasing in three-year-olds from low-income families; and further assesses all children to identify those who need additional supports
- 2) [High Quality Teachers and Leaders](#): Create a leadership development system that develops leaders at all levels and redesigns schools to be places where teachers will be treated as professionals, with incentives to improve their professional practice.
- 3) [College and Career Readiness Pathways](#):
  - a. Develop a world class instructional system that will enable Maryland high school graduates to internationally compete with peers; create effective system of career and technical education training.
- 4) More Resources for At-risk Students for them to succeed alongside their peers
- 5) Governance and accountability: Institute a governance system with the authority to develop coherent and powerful policies and capable of implementing them at scale.

### *Investing in Capital School Maintenance and Construction*

Appropriate capital investments for our school infrastructure is critical to providing safe, healthy and innovative teaching and learning environments for all. Addressing the challenges of approximately \$500M in deferred maintenance and school overcrowding builds a commitment to

assess and prioritize safety measures in our school infrastructure and community needs. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Facilities Commission ([Knott Commission on School Construction](#)) underscores the critical, increased need for the State to contribute funding for capital projects. The county supports an increase in state funds for construction and renovation to alleviate school overcrowding and prioritize high schools 13 and 14. Moving forward, I will foster a more integrated and collaborative planning approach that will address efficiently and effectively using existing school capacity as future schools are in the planning stages.

#### *Re-establishing Local Autonomy of School Calendar*

The post-Labor Day school start mandate has created significant challenges for many counties, especially majority-minority communities like ours, where we observe different religious and cultural holidays. The County supports local control over our school calendar and [HB 437](#) would allow the Howard County Board of Education to determine our school start and end date without needing approval from the state Board of Education.

## **ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

#### *Growing Businesses Within the Gateway Innovation Center*

Maximizing a matching [\\$500,000 bond initiative](#) from the State, the Howard County Economic Development Authority plans to design and construct an innovation incubator for our county. This evolving public-private partnership will help create, support and sustain the creation of small, minority, woman and veteran-owned businesses focusing on areas of cyber security, medical technologies, agricultural technologies and government solutions providers. Investing in the Gateway Innovation hub will allow for Howard County to attract and retain the best talent that will help our community prosper.

#### *Responsibly Expanding Small Cells Deployment and 5G Capabilities*

The County supports keeping pace with technology and the need for reliable and expedient broadband capabilities. In April 2017, the Howard County Council passed legislation to allow small cell installations to provide our residents and visitors with the benefits 5G technology. Counties around the state support the Community Coalition bills, [SB 713](#) | [HB 1020](#) that would preserve local autonomy and an open and transparent approval process for these installations. Collectively, we are closely monitoring [SB 937](#) | [HB 654](#) as they work through the committee process. The County stands in solidarity with my colleagues in suburban, rural and urban jurisdictions who are concerned these bills could jeopardize local property rights, erode zoning regulations and impose fiscal challenges on our communities.

## **ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

### *Increasing the Minimum Wage*

Despite Howard County's affluence, there is a significant population of wage earners with families who struggle to meet basic cost of living expenses despite working full time. Amongst the county's most vulnerable population, 22 percent of Howard County Public School students receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs), a number that has doubled since 2008. In 2017, over 540,000 meals were distributed from our Food Bank to food insecure families. Additionally, there is an increased need for Temporary Cash Assistance and thousands of families on the waiting list for Housing Choice Vouchers. Simply put, there are Howard County families with real, significant needs.

Passing [SB 280](#) | [HB 166](#) to raise the state's stagnant minimum wage would be a return to the county's roots of economic integration by assisting hard-working residents to live and thrive in our county. Supporting a standard minimum wage while maintaining the ability of local governments to make improvements as necessary could be a driving force for our local economy. A 2017 analysis of self-sufficiency indicators conducted by the Association of Community Services detailed the economic challenges many families face in Howard County. A single adult would need to earn \$34,924 to live in Howard County which equates to a wage of \$16.54 per hour. An adult with two-school age children must earn \$68,373 annually to be self-sufficient, the equivalent of a \$32.37 per hour wage.

Since the federal government has not increased the minimum wage in twenty years, Howard County must take the lead at the state and local level to implement sound public policy and close the gap of economic disparities.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### *Advocating for Ellicott City*

After Ellicott City's devastating floods of 2016 and 2018, Howard County was fortunate to have received assistance from Federal and State governments. Howard County incurred \$11M in damage after the 2016 flood and \$27.1M since the 2018 flood. In addition to other jurisdictions across the state vulnerable to severe weather, Howard County could positively benefit from a state-established grant program. The County supports [SB 269](#) | [HB 428](#) which would provide a dedicated grant fund for flood control and watershed capital projects aimed at reducing the likelihood of another flood event. Establishing a comprehensive flood management grant program would ensure continued assistance to assist affected jurisdictions with infrastructure infrastructure repairs, debris removal and emergency protection work due to severe flooding.

### *Partnering with our Neighbors*

While Climate Change is a global issue, strong, regional action is critical to create sustainable and collaborative solutions to complicated problems. Passing [SB 249](#) | [HB 277](#) and authorizing the Governor to join and expand regional initiatives to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions

is just one of many actions that can and should be taken. By joining the “We Are Still In” declaration, Howard County has advanced our commitment to sustainable and local solutions to preserve our evolving environment. Requiring the Department of the Environment and Department of Transportation to submit environmental reports will enable us to prioritize and strengthen our efforts to combat climate change. Maryland should continue to be a leader of environmental conservation by prioritizing, improving the quality of life for our citizens, and combatting the very real effects of climate change together.

#### *Supporting Renewable Energy Sources*

The County supports renewable energy and legislation that would review the state’s Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards (RPS). Whether solar or offshore wind, clean, renewable energy can be an instrument of job creation and a powerful driver of economic development and the county must continue to advocate for a sustainable future that will ensure a healthy environment for our future.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

#### *Combating the Opioid epidemic and Increasing Harm Reduction Services*

Significant funding is needed to remedy the public health crisis plaguing our communities across the state. Funding for opioid treatment and providing the necessary resources to the health department for public health services, community outreach and education. This will require state funding to meet the increasing demand for substance recovery efforts, transition housing and reintegration programs. During 2018 in Howard County, there were 187 non-fatal overdoses and 41 deaths, 38 of which were opioid related. Maryland was recently awarded \$39 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund community health centers and increase access to medication-assisted treatment. In collaboration with local health departments, [SB 135](#) | [HB 139](#) would allow a community-based organization to provide a safe, supervised facility for Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Site Program in addition to providing access points of care for treatment and recovery.

#### *Lowering Prescription Drug Costs*

Medical debt is the leading cause of bankruptcy in America. Even here in Howard County, too many of our citizens cannot afford the costs associated with challenging medical illnesses, especially prescription drugs. In 2017, American Community Services reported approximately 43,873 Howard County residents were enrolled in Medicaid. Additionally, amongst residents with incomes less than \$50,000 per year, 17% reported they were unable to see a doctor in the prior year due to associated costs. The County supports [SB 759](#) | [HB 768](#), which would create an independent, Prescription Drug Affordability Board to establish transparency and evaluate the soaring costs of prescription drugs and set reasonable rates for Marylanders. No one should ever have to forgo medical treatment and be forced to choose between their medications or buying groceries.



### *Sustaining Prescription Drug Coverage for State Retirees*

Soon after the 2018 legislative session concluded, thousands of State retirees received a letter from the Department of Budget and Management stating their prescription drug coverage was scheduled for termination. Temporary measures were put in place by the Administration and Presiding Officers to reverse that decision. There is bi-partisan support for [SB193](#) | [HB98](#) which would require the state to continue to assist our state retirees, many who live in Howard County, often living on a fixed income and some of whom face significant medical challenges.

## **HOUSING**

A substantial number of Marylanders live in one county and commute to surrounding jurisdictions for job opportunities and access to safe, affordable housing. As Howard County strives to be a model for live, work, play concept, increasing the amount of affordable housing units within the county will not only attract new residents but also allow access the needs of those who already live within the county. There is a significant need for affordable and low-income housing for seniors and the developmentally disabled community.

### *Supporting Howard County's Most Vulnerable and Resilient*

Veterans and survivors of domestic violence often face challenging circumstances obtaining community services. The County supports [HB 672](#) | [SB 810](#) which would establish the Local Housing Grant Program for Homeless Veterans and Survivors of Domestic Violence. Administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), this dedicated fund would receive \$2M annually in state funding and ¼ county investment by way of either funding or voucher matching. Supporting efforts to reduce the county's homeless population and prioritize necessary supports for survivors of intimate partner violence strengthens our community.

### *Enabling Seniors to Age in Place*

Seniors are the fastest growing demographic within Howard County and to support aging in place, we must provide viable options for our aging population to do so. The Nonprofits for our Aging Neighbors Act (NANA), [SB 279](#) | [HB 251](#), would authorize the Department of Aging to give grants to non-profit organizations to expand or establish aging-in-place programs, which in turn require an equal funding match from the nonprofit. Working in coordination with surrounding jurisdictions, area nonprofits may apply for a state grant if they assist in improving the safety, mobility or accessibility of a home, coordinate support services or care, provide reliable transportation, or assist with in-home care services. The County is supportive of legislation that allows our seniors to stay in their homes and communities they have grown to love.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

### *Modernizing our Emergency Services through Next Gen 9-1-1 Implementation*

Last session, the General Assembly approved a commission to assess best practices for the expansion of emergency technological services. This year, jurisdictions across the State are working to effectively support the transition to implement the changes recommended and prioritize the modernization of our emergency response system. Requiring both operating and capital funding, [SB 339](#) | [HB 397](#) are necessary measures to innovate and accelerate utilization of essential emergency services. Next Gen 9-1-1 will operate on a secure and consistently monitored network in addition to enabling citizens the ability to contact 911 via voice, text, photos and video. Most importantly, this new technology will allow for surrounding jurisdictions to intercept our emergency calls in the event of a high call volumes due to a large-scale event. The County supports residents having access to responsive and efficient services and platforms that keep our community safe and secure.

### *Addressing Cyberbullying and Promoting Suicide Prevention Campaign*

Social media management and keeping children safe online is often a top priority for parents, guardians and teachers. Grace's Law 2.0, [SB 103](#) | [HB 181](#), is an expansion of the original bill introduced in 2014 in honor of Grace McComas, a Howard County student who took her own life in 2012 after being threatened and bullied online. Social media can be a harsh environment and this bill would expand the scope of cyberbullying and prohibit an individual from maliciously engaging in harassment and intimidation online with the intent of provoking a minor to commit suicide. Between 2014-2016, suicide was the leading cause of death amongst teenagers ages 15-19 in Howard County. The County's recent "It's OK to Ask" youth suicide prevention campaign was developed to provide more resources for students and families in crisis and proactively. Any efforts, legislative or otherwise, to increase services to prevent suicide and reduce the stigma around mental health challenges is imperative.

### *Eliminating Human Trafficking*

The County supports working with local law enforcement and the State's Attorney's office to combat human trafficking. While encouraging a collaborative local and state approach, the County supports the introduction and passing of policies that would advance the rights of victims and apply stronger penalties for perpetrators. The True Freedom Act, [HB 782](#) | [SB 691](#), would allow survivors of human trafficking the opportunity to have judgements against them vacated and any initial conviction expunged from their records. This bill is a critical step in securing resources such as employment, housing and social services often challenging to obtain for those with felony convictions.

### *Securing Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors*

In Maryland, over 6,000 Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SAEKs) remain untested due to funding limitations across jurisdictions. While there have been significant strides over the last few years to reduce the backlog, more can be done. The County supports legislation that would assist law enforcement agencies in obtaining dedicated funding from state to alleviate some of the cost associated with analyzing kits. [SB 569](#) | [HB 1268](#) would establish the Rape Kit Testing Grant



Fund which would assist local law enforcement agencies to pay for testing of backlogged and future SAEKs. The analysis of these kits can empower survivors of sexual assault and help identify and punish perpetrators.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### *Advocating for Juvenile Justice and Restorative Practices*

Established by legislation passed in the 2017 legislative session, [HB 1287](#), the Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices recently released a report including recommendations for implementing best practices in promoting a positive school environment that focuses on rehabilitative discipline and interventions. Aligned with the Kirwan Commission's recommendations of promoting educational equity, the report encourages school systems to support and adopt restorative justice techniques within the classroom. Including and ensuring that our teacher and professional staff training include restorative approaches, implicit bias and cultural competency. These best practices are critical to Howard County, as recent studies have indicated that African American students are seven times more likely to be suspended than their white classmates. Even though African American's are less than 30 percent of the County's population, African American students account for more than 50 percent of school suspensions.

### *Holding Perpetrators of Hate and Bias Crimes Responsible*

Since 2017, there has been a statewide increase in hate and bias related crimes of nearly 35 percent. In Howard County, a community that prides itself on diversity and acceptance, we have had our share of unfortunate incidents over the last year alone. [HB 4](#) would prohibit the use of a noose or swastika to threaten or intimidate an individual. Statewide, 20.4% was verbal intimidation and targeting, vandalism accounted for 33.4% of incidents and 18.8% were written intimidation. Roughly 44.5% of incidents were anti-African American, 19.6 anti-Semitic and 6.5% anti-LGBTQIA. Racism, symbols of hate and vitriol have no place in our society, let alone our backyard.

## **STATE FUNDING FOR LOCAL BOND INITIATIVES**

The County supports the State Delegation in requesting [more than \\$2 million](#) in bond initiatives for capital projects that would invest in improving access to early childhood education, expanding the arts district in downtown Columbia, and preserving our historic landmarks throughout the county.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Funding for transit in Howard County has remained flat in the last decade. Increased federal and state operating funding is needed to boost our transit system and support the local economy, improve mobility for the aging population, mitigate congestion, and provide sustainable alternatives.

Leveraging regional resources and state assistance, Howard County can significantly improve our transportation needs and increase a variety of transit-oriented and multi-modal development. Having reliable and robust transportation will spur economic growth and future investment from prospective companies looking to expand or build their brand within Howard County. The upcoming annual priority letter to the Maryland Department of Transportation's FY2020-2025 Consolidated Transportation Program will include a list of the County's transit priorities. Public input will likely include the widening of sections along US 29 and I-70, intersection improvements along MD 108, as well as the designing and constructing of sidewalks, pedestrian safety improvements and expectations of the bicycle master plan.

Working with the BUILD funding program and the continuation of the Transportation Alternatives Program will assist Howard County with maintaining and developing reliable and accessible transit models. Additionally, the eventual development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along US 29 and expansion of existing routes within the in Central Maryland Transit Development Plan will ultimately connect our residents to employment, education and recreational opportunities in and around our region.