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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DELEGATION ANNOUNCES 2015 SESSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE COUNTY

ANNAPOLIS – The 32-member Montgomery County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly today announced its 2015 legislative accomplishments for Montgomery County.

Differences over how to reconcile the State's operating budget dominated conversations during the 90 Day Session, with some spending programs level funded and others reduced or eliminated to help create a balanced budget. Overall, State aid directed to Montgomery County will increase by about \$14 million, from \$715 million to \$729 million. Nearly all of this increase is attributed to mandated State funding to support the costs of delivering public K-12 education services in the County's growing school system.

An additional \$17.7 million would have been included in these numbers had the Legislature's plan to restore full funding for the Geographic Cost of Index (GCEI) been realized before the Session adjourned. The GCEI was included as part of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act which was enacted in 2002 to help offset the costs of providing education services in higher cost subdivisions. The GCEI is a critical source of funds for the County's school system, which struggles to keep up with burgeoning enrollment growth and shifting student demographics. If the Governor does not restore full funding for the GCEI this year, legislation passed in the closing hours of the Session will mandate full funding for the program in future years.

On the capital side, the State Delegation obtained passage of a targeted supplemental public school construction grant program that directs additional State capital funds to high growth subdivisions and those utilizing significant numbers of portable classrooms. Based on that criteria and the Delegation's successful advocacy of advancing funding for the program, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) will be able to access about \$6 million in additional State capital funds this year and into the future. Although final public school construction allocations will not be finalized before May, the Delegation hopes that MCPS will receive at least \$46 million this year to help address its critical school capacity issues.

In addition to this major win for the County, the Delegation secured funding for every capital project included on the County's 2015 Session Priorities list. State capital funds were appropriated for two County libraries, several hospitals located in the County, the National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence, the Music Center at Strathmore, Montgomery College, the Universities at Shady Grove, the Montgomery County Pre-Release Center, and the Avery Road Treatment Center. The Delegation also directed \$2.3 million in State capital grant funding for smaller community projects that support the arts, recreation, and social services.

On the economic development front, a package of bills codifying recommendations of the Maryland Economic Development and Business Climate Commission (“Augustine Commission”) was strongly supported by House and Senate Leadership and the Montgomery County Delegation. These proposals are all geared toward spurring additional economic growth throughout the State while capitalizing on existing assets. One of Maryland’s greatest assets is its high quality public higher education system. Both the operating and capital budgets reflect significant State investment to ensure that our colleges remain affordable, on the cutting edge, and have the physical plants to meet demands.

The State Legislature also took up several tax issues that are important to Montgomery County. Language was included in the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act to help local governments and the State in the event the U.S. Supreme Court rules against the State in *Wynne v. Comptroller*. While taxpayers will receive their refunds as soon as returns are processed, the reimbursement to the State for the local share of taxes will be spread over three years. In addition, the language clarifies that moving forward, the State tax liability must be exhausted before credits are taken against county and municipal income taxes.

Also, a State income tax break for retired military personnel (including the Public Health Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Coast and Geodetic Survey) was doubled for military retirees over the age of 65. Eligible retirees will be able to subtract an additional \$5,000 when determining their taxable income.

Turning to health and human services issues, efforts were made to restore cuts that would hurt vulnerable residents and impair the County Department of Health and Human Services’ ability to provide safety net services. Unfortunately, the Session ended without these funds being secured. The Governor could make appropriations to restore funding for core public health, heroin outpatient treatment, community first choice waiver, adult daycare centers, and maternity benefits and family planning. Additional appropriations could be made to the Developmental Disabilities Administration for crisis resolution services, provider rates, and contracts for community services.

The General Assembly tackled a number of high-profile issues in the public safety arena. Increasing the public’s trust between police departments and Maryland communities was of paramount importance in the adoption of legislation on law enforcement officers’ use of body-worn cameras (BWC) as well as changes to existing state law on asset forfeiture procedures. Well-structured BWC programs have been shown to have a positive effect on the overall number of use-of-force incidents by police, reduced complaints of officer misconduct, decreased lawsuits, better documentation of crime scenes, and overall improved relations between police and civilians.

Responding to recent unfavorable national news reports on asset forfeiture programs, the Delegation worked to approve several changes to State law on seizure and forfeiture of property in connection with drug-related crimes and other criminal activity. Law enforcement agencies will be subjected to additional reporting requirements that affirm the value of the program’s use against criminal enterprises while addressing potential police abuse of asset forfeiture laws by increasing transparency in the level of seizure and forfeiture activity in the State.

On human trafficking, the Delegation continued to press for legislation that protects the victims of this coercive and violent criminal activity. A measure was adopted to establish a workgroup to study safe harbor policies for youth victims of human trafficking. Public and private sector programs will be evaluated to reveal gaps in services, and data will be collected on the number of youth victims in each jurisdiction in the State. In addition, the Delegation advocated for successful legislation to assert an affirmative defense of duress if the individual committed a criminal act as a result of being a human trafficking victim.

Improving transportation options and relieving congestion in the D.C. region are always front and center issues for the Montgomery Delegation. This year, the Delegation successfully worked toward the adoption of a bill requiring MDOT to study the utilization of bus, rail and subway systems under WMATA's jurisdiction every five years. Funding for Maryland's portion of WMATA is the State's responsibility and understanding capacity and growth issues is essential.

This year the Legislature addressed ridesharing operations, such as Uber and Lyft. There will now be clear authority for ridesharing operations to be conducted in Maryland, with oversight provided by the Public Service Commission. The legislation clarifies new rules that will apply addressing insurance, background checks, and other requirements for ridesharing operations.

Several high profile environmental issues also dominated the attention of Delegation members serving on the General Assembly's environmental committees this year. The controversial stormwater charge mandate that was imposed in 2012 was removed by the General Assembly. In exchange, the legislation increases reporting requirements and strengthens accountability to ensure compliance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's standards for stormwater remediation.

For several years, opponents to the contentious natural gas drilling process known as hydraulic fracturing have sought a ban. Voicing continued concern about potential risks to the environment, several Delegation members co-sponsored successful legislation to prevent permits for fracking until October 1, 2017.

The Delegation supported legislation to increase the annual percentage requirements for solar resources to help meet the State's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard. Despite these efforts, the General Assembly did not increase the requirements this year. The bill did serve to spur awareness and conversation on this emerging issue.

The 2015 Session opened with over 60 new legislators -- five of whom were elected from Montgomery County -- and a new governor. The accomplishments and work conducted in this first year of the term will likely lay the groundwork for the remaining three years.

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ATTACHMENTS