



April 14, 2009

Dear Friends:

With the bang of a gavel at midnight, the 2009 Session of the General Assembly came to a close. This session was marked by the most difficult fiscal situation facing the State since the Great Depression. Although we had to make very painful decisions, with the help of stimulus funds from the Obama economic recovery package, we increased aid for our schools (ranked #1 in the country), continued the freeze on college tuition, avoided cuts to health care programs for low-income families, and passed some other important legislation without raising taxes.

This was my most successful year so far in terms of passing legislation. I passed 10 bills and had 3 others incorporated into other legislation. In this Annual Report, I will update you on my legislative activities and tell you about some important new legislation, as well as some failed legislation. For a list of my Senate and State positions, [click here](#).

We are losing the battle to save the Bay. As we struggle to clean up existing pollution, we allow more and more new pollution to enter the Bay and its tributaries. As long as we keep playing catch-up, we will never win. Recognizing we have no hope of restoring the Bay unless we stop pollution before it enters, I passed two landmark bills to implement a "front end" strategy. The **Chesapeake Bay Nitrogen Reduction Act** will reduce nitrogen pollution from septic systems in the "Critical Areas" bordering the Bay and the **Chesapeake Bay Phosphorous Reduction Act** will reduce phosphorous pollution from lawn fertilizer. Together, these bills will significantly improve our Bay, rivers and streams.

With all the focus on homeowners forced into foreclosure by the economic crisis, we have overlooked the plight of lower-income renters caught in the foreclosure web and being thrown out on the street with little or no notice. My bill to provide **Protection for Tenants in Foreclosure** makes us one of the first states to address this problem. It will require several notices to tenants about foreclosures, providing the critical time necessary for them to negotiate new leases with the foreclosure purchasers or take other actions to prevent harm to their families.

We finally passed a bill to **Prohibit Texting While Driving** to make our roads safer. I have led the fight in Annapolis the last three years to prohibit the use of hand-held cell phones and text messaging while driving, but I am happy we got at least half of this legislation passed this year. Passing the bill to prohibit text messaging was a major breakthrough, but it is not enough. Hopefully, it will pave the way for the ban on hand-held cell phones next year. I am encouraged by this progress and the outpouring of support I have received from many of you for this important public safety bill. So the cell phone ban may be off the hook again, but don't hang up on it yet. I won't give up the fight! Also, on the road safety front, I introduced a bill to require **On-Road Tests for Driver's Licenses**. Spurred by the legislation, MVA has announced that it will add an on-road component to the driver's license test, which will ensure that applicants are ready for the road.

As our society continues to age, we have a growing number of people who want to age in place rather than be forced into institutions. But we have yet to grapple with the changes necessary to accommodate the elderly and disabled. This is what my work on the Empowerment Zones for Seniors Commission is all about. One of the major things we must do is increase the supply of accessible housing. Many seniors and disabled individuals who could live independently are stuck in institutions solely because they cannot find accessible housing. For the past two years, I have been working on legislation to create more homes with accessibility features. Fighting developers has not been easy, so I will lead a **Housing Accessibility Study** this summer to see how we can work together to improve physical access. I will also be leading a study this summer on **Barriers to Voting for the Disabled**. For my related work in passing legislation to promote economic opportunities for the disabled, I was honored as Legislator of the Year by Maryland Works.

We have a strong open meetings policy in Maryland, but there have been many reports around the state that homeowner and condo associations have been closing board meetings to their residents. To address this, I passed two **Community Democracy** bills to prevent association boards from closing meetings, except in very narrow, specified circumstances. These bills will provide greater transparency and a greater voice by residents in important decisions affecting their communities and pocketbooks. For my work on progressive issues, I was named Legislative Champion for Working Families by Progressive Maryland last year.

Governor O'Malley and I sponsored legislation to crack down on domestic violence by requiring the **Surrender of Firearms Upon Final Protective Orders** issued against individuals. Law enforcement noted that this is especially important given that most homicides in domestic situations occur almost immediately after the parties separate. This bill hopefully will save many lives and reduce the threat of gun violence against women who have been subjected to domestic violence. I also co-sponsored legislation that will now give judges new authority to take away the firearms of anyone who is the subject of a temporary protective order.

As a member of the Environment Subcommittee, I worked hard to help enact the **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act** to alleviate the problem of global warming. Maryland is the third most vulnerable state to coastal flooding, and this bill will make our state a national leader in reducing greenhouse gases. Under this bill, Maryland will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% from 2006 levels by 2020.

As a member of the Ethics and Election Law Subcommittee, I helped craft legislation to implement **Early Voting**, which was approved by the voters in a referendum in the last election. I also helped block efforts to postpone the implementation of the new system to provide **Verifiable Voting With a Paper Trail**.

Although many people don't like them, speed cameras in Montgomery County have proved remarkably effective, reducing speeding rates by 70%. I support speed cameras but my efforts have been to ensure they are used fairly and not just as a money-maker. This year we passed a state-wide bill to authorize **Speed Cameras in School and Work Zones** because children and road workers are most vulnerable to reckless speeders. My legislation to prevent speed camera contracts under which vendors are paid based on the number of tickets issued was incorporated into the state-wide bill.

I also passed bills to require plans for **Recycling in Public Schools**, to extend the bond bill for the **Agricultural Activity Center** in Derwood, to modernize the requirements for **Licenses to Practice Psychology**, and to improve the **Maryland Youth Advisory Council** (which I created last year). I was recently honored as Legislator of the Year by the Montgomery County Student Government Association.

I continue to work on my other legislation, including the **Seniors Tax Relief Act**, the **Financial Exploitation Protection Act**, the **End of Life Health Care Disclosure Act**, and **Increased Penalties for Wage and Overtime Violations**.

One of my proudest accomplishments this year did not even require legislation. I successfully brought together all the stakeholders involved in the issue of **School-Based Health Care** for a series of work and negotiation sessions at my office in Annapolis. For many low-income children covered by Medicaid, the only medical care they receive is through the schools. However, managed care organizations often do not reimburse school health centers for this care. The negotiations eventually led to an agreement for new regulations under which school-based health centers will be reimbursed for care they provide to children covered by Medicaid.

### **Other Issues in the 2009 Session**

**Freedom of Association and Assembly Protection Act** - In response to reports that the state police had spied on lawful, nonviolent advocacy groups across the state and had listed peace and anti-death penalty activists as domestic terrorists and placed their names into federal and state criminal intelligence databases, this bill was enacted to reinforce First Amendment protections and require greater oversight of intelligence databases.

**Death Penalty Restrictions** - Although strong advocacy to repeal the death penalty failed, the General Assembly adopted one of the strictest death penalty laws in the nation. Under this bill, the death penalty could be imposed only if there is biological evidence, a videotaped confession, or a videotape of the crime.

**Exempting Domestic Partners From Inheritance Tax** - Under this bill, domestic partners whose spouses have passed away would not have to pay inheritance tax on the value of their home.

**Education Funding and College Tuition** - Maryland's funding commitments to education have clearly paid off, as our schools now enjoy the number one ranking in the country. This year, despite a difficult budget situation, we continued our commitment by increasing aid by \$132 million. We also maintained the freeze on our higher education tuition for the fourth consecutive year.

**Re-Regulation of Electricity** - It has been 10 years since we deregulated the electricity market in Maryland, and the promised competition, more choices, and lower prices have not materialized. Legislation to move us back to a regulated system failed this year, but the heated debate continues.

**De-Funding the ICC** - As the work on the new highway continues, bills to defund the project again failed.

**Smart Growth** - The Governor proposed legislation designed to reduce sprawl around the state and protect our natural resources. Bills to update the smart growth "visions," develop measures of smart growth, and require counties to follow their own plans passed, but the major bill to require smart growth plans to meet certain standards relating to new development, vehicle traffic, affordable housing, and job creation failed.

**Workplace Fraud Act** - This bill prevents employers from misclassifying certain workers as independent contractors instead of employees in order to avoid taxes, insurance costs, and payroll deductions. Such conduct results in workers being denied health coverage, medical leave, and other benefits and the state being denied millions in potential revenues.

Feel free to contact me any time about these or other issues of concern. Your feedback is essential to my ability to address the issues that affect our lives and our communities here in District 19. You can email me at [mike.lenett@senate.state.md.us](mailto:mike.lenett@senate.state.md.us) or call my office at 301-858-3151. Also, as always, constituents can reach me directly, 24/7, on my personal cell phone at 301-523-3366. Thank you so much for all your support.

With warmest regards to you and your family,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Mike Lenett, Senator, District 19**

By authority: Friends of Mike Lenett; Ron Little, Treasurer