



MARYLAND SENATE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS

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Senate Republicans Announce 2023 Legislative Agenda

Caucus priorities include combating the rising cost of living and violent crime, promoting transparency and accountability

Annapolis, Md. – Today, the Senate Republican Caucus announced its 2023 Legislative Agenda that is focused on commonsense proposals to relieve the rising cost of living, combat violent crime, promote educational opportunities and parental involvement, and champion transparency and accountability in State government.

“Just as we have approached Governor Moore’s legislative priorities with an open mind and found some common ground, we are hopeful that the Governor and our Democratic colleagues will approach our legislative proposals in good faith,” said Senate Minority Leader Steve Hershey. “In addition to these specific bills, we will promote transparency in the legislative process and focus on holding the Democratic supermajority accountable for their policies and ensuring that Marylanders are receiving the promised return on their significant investment in state government.”

“Good ideas don’t come with a party label,” said Senate Minority Whip Justin Ready. “Our commonsense agenda will protect and improve the lives of all Marylanders. We are pleased that two out of our three bills that combat violent crime already have bipartisan support. We look forward to building on that as we move forward.”

Senate Republican Legislative Priorities Include:

- SB 261 – Gas Tax Consumer Price Index Repeal
- SB 461 – Retirement Tax Elimination Act of 2023
- SB 744 – Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2023
- SB 745 – Gun Violence Accountability Act
- SB 564 – Theft of Handgun – Felony
- SB 522 – Education - Accountability & Implementation Board – Membership
- SB 566 – Family Law – Fundamental Parental Rights

Restoration of BOOST Funding in the FY24 Budget

Cost of Living & Tax Relief

SB 261: Motor Fuel Tax Rates - Consumer Price Index Adjustment - Repeal

For the second year, Senate Republicans are working to repeal the automatic, annual gas tax increase that is tied to inflation (CPI). On July 1, 2022, Maryland's gas tax jumped by 19.4% and increased to nearly 43 cents per gallon, making it the fourth-highest gas tax in the Country. As the United States continues to grapple with high inflation, continued sharp increases to Maryland's gas tax can be expected into the future. To add insult to injury, Maryland's gas tax is not responsive to market conditions, and does not decrease if inflation decreases.

Repealing the automatic increase is also a matter of transparency and accountability. Every year, the gas tax increases without public input and a vote of the General Assembly. If legislators want to increase the gas tax, they need to follow the legislative process and be held accountable.

Even more concerning is that this same model is being considered for future minimum wage increases, and Senate Republicans oppose this cowardly approach from becoming common practice in Annapolis.

[SB 261](#) is scheduled for a hearing the Senate Budget. & Taxation Committee on Wednesday, February 8th.

SB 461: Retirement Tax Elimination Act of 2023

Senate Republicans are again championing the elimination of all retiree income taxes. The retiree tax reduction passed last year was a first step, however, \$1,000 is not enough to keep our retirees in their home state. Retirees play critical roles in our communities as volunteers and mentors. As Governor Moore stated, "Maryland is no one's farm team." We need to make Maryland affordable and keep those that call Maryland home here and not lose them to nearby retirement-friendly states.

Senate Republicans support Governor Moore's proposal to provide retiree income tax relief to our veterans and believe that all retirees deserve the same.

[SB 461](#) is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Budget & Taxation Committee on Wednesday, March 1st.

Combating Violent Crime

The Senate Republican crime package complements other proposals this session to address violent crime and hold repeat, violent offenders accountable.

SB 744 – Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2023

The Violent Firearms Offender Act passed the Senate during the 2021 Session (SB 852) but died in the House. SB 744 is a reintroduction of the amended bill that received bipartisan support two years ago.

SB 744 increases the penalties for committing crimes with an illegal firearm from 3 years to 5 years of prison time and raises the maximum fine from \$2,500 to \$10,000. It also repeals the unconscionable drug dealer loophole where drug dealers receive a lighter sentence than someone else convicted of the same offense. It also creates penalties for someone who sells or gives someone a gun knowing that they will use it to commit a crime.

[SB 744](#) has not yet been assigned a hearing date and has bipartisan support.

SB 745 – Gun Violence Accountability Act

In an effort to suppress violent crime and make our communities safer, the Senate Republican Caucus reached out to newly-elected Baltimore City States Attorney Ivan Bates to discuss actionable policies that are needed and could be implemented.

The Gun Violence Accountability Act is legislation supported by Baltimore City State’s Attorney Ivan Bates. SB 745 increases the penalties for illegally possessing a firearm from 3 years to 5 years of prison time and increases the maximum fine from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

[SB 745](#) has not yet been assigned a hearing date.

SB 564 – Criminal Law – Theft of a Handgun

Making the theft of a handgun a felony has been a long-standing priority of the Senate Republican Caucus. This measure was amended into public safety legislation in previous years but was later stripped out in the House of Delegates.

SB 564 makes the theft of a handgun a felony, not misdemeanor, and establishes penalties for a first conviction of 2 to 5 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$1,000. Subsequent convictions carry imprisonment of 5 to 10 years and/or a fine of up to \$2,500.

[SB 564](#) has not yet been assigned a hearing date and has bipartisan support.

Education & Parental Involvement

Restoring BOOST Funding

Senate Republicans believe in an “all of the above” approach to education where parents should have the ability to choose the schools that are the best fit for the needs of their children and family, whether that be a public school, private school, charter school, virtual school or homeschool option.

Our members were disappointed that Governor Moore’s FY24 Budget proposal eliminated 20% (\$2 million) of funding for the BOOST Program that provides scholarships for low-income students to attend nonpublic schools. Senate Republicans will work within Maryland’s new budget process to restore that funding and make school choice an option for low-income children.

SB 522 - Education – Accountability and Implementation Board - Membership

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) is the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future – the \$32 billion, ten-year overhaul of the state’s public education system. In September 2021 when the AIB members were approved, our members were deeply concerned that board did not include representation from any of Maryland’s rural jurisdictions.

The enormous amount of tax dollars being spent by the AIB are being provided by all Marylanders, not just those living in Central Maryland. Every Marylander deserves to have a representative on the Board that is knowledgeable and has experienced the challenges and opportunities facing public education from all areas of the State.

Having broad geographic representation on the Board is imperative to realizing success in every jurisdiction within our state, and SB 522 would ensure that the AIB has one representative from Western Maryland (Allegany, Carroll, Frederick, Garrett or Washington Counties), one representative from Southern Maryland (Calvert, Charles or St. Mary's Counties), one representative from the Eastern Shore (Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico or Worcester Counties), and one member from each of the counties with the largest student populations in the State.

[SB 522](#) does not yet have a hearing date scheduled.

SB 566- Family Law – Fundamental Parental Rights

SB 566 clearly codifies the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing, education, care, and welfare of their children in state law and prohibits state government from infringing on a parent's right to do so.

Especially in the areas of education and healthcare, it is imperative that state policies always point towards strengthening parental involvement, supporting parents' primary role in their children's development, and promoting transparency in how the government engages with their children.

[SB 566](#) does not yet have a hearing scheduled.

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