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Do Maryland Lawmakers Make the Grade?

ROCKVILLE, MD (June 16, 2016) – The Maryland Public Policy Institute today released their 2016 report card for the Maryland General Assembly’s legislative session, which concluded in April. The Annapolis Report is an unsparing report card on the Democratic-controlled legislature’s ability to work with Republican Governor Larry Hogan and assigns grades for their work on the state budget, education and other pressing issues. The full report can be viewed online at mdpolicy.org.

“This is not a report card I would want to take home to my parents,” said Christopher B. Summers. “Maryland legislators seem unable to budge from their decades-long habit of overspending with other peoples’ money. Despite modest progress in the areas of criminal justice and education, much work remains to be done to rein in government overreach in Maryland.”

Budget – Grade: C

After a year of relative fiscal restraint, Maryland lawmakers once again returned to their big-spending ways, increasing spending by nearly 5 percent. This irresponsible spending increase is tempered by the fact that the structural deficit has improved somewhat in the short run.

Tax Relief – Grade: F

Both the governor and legislative leaders have stated that they want to lower taxes. Unfortunately, disagreements over specific rate cuts doomed the process. Instead of lowering the high tax rates imposed on Marylanders, legislators did nothing.

Crime – Grade: B

Legislators should be commended for re-evaluating Maryland’s criminal penalties. By lowering the penalties for non-violent crimes and increasing them for some violent crimes, legislators are taking positive steps to rebalance the justice system.

Education – Grade: C

While other states embrace programs that give parents school choice options, Maryland legislators continue to protect the status quo. They rejected legislation to encourage privately funded scholarships for non-public schools. However, the state budget did include funding for a small program for some low-income students to attend private school.

Business and Economy – Grade: C

Lawmakers adopted new prevailing wage legislation and a wage mandate for disabled workers—initiatives that will harm taxpayers and some workers. On the other hand, lawmakers refrained from imposing expensive sick leave requirements on the state’s businesses, which *de facto* would have imposed another payroll tax on workers. Legislators also get credit for relaxing some occupational licensing laws, although significant work is still needed to remove these types of barriers to employment.

Elections – Grade: F

Maryland has some of the most egregiously gerrymandered congressional districts in the nation. In 2015, a state bipartisan commission made solid recommendations on how to reform the process that draws these districts. Although the commission’s plan united individuals and groups across the political spectrum, Maryland lawmakers refused to let legislation that would enact this plan out of committee, thereby putting national party politics ahead of basic fairness to state voters.

About the Maryland Public Policy Institute: Founded in 2001, the Maryland Public Policy Institute is a nonpartisan public policy research and education organization that focuses on state policy issues. The Institute’s mission is to formulate and promote public policies at all levels of government based on principles of free enterprise, limited government, and civil society. Learn more at mdpolicy.org.

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