

# 2021

## Baltimore Jewish Council Legislative Priorities Report

The 442nd session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded on April 12, 2021. Unlike last year, the legislature was able to meet for the full 90-day session. But it was absent the physical presence of advocates, activists, and citizens. Due to the pandemic, much of the legislative proceedings took place virtually. Despite this, the Baltimore Jewish Council's legislative team played an active role throughout the session advocating for a robust set of priorities on behalf of the Baltimore Jewish Community and the entire State of Maryland. Below is a list of priority bills and budget items that we advocated for and a report on their final status.

### CAPITAL BUDGET

#### **Pearlstone Center Renovation and Expansion**

**\$1 million received for FY22 (\$1 million received in FY 21)**

Utilizing 180 acres of rolling hills, farmland, and forest in northwest Baltimore County, the Pearlstone Campus impacts over 20,000 annual participants from across the state of Maryland. In order to accommodate more community visitors and expanded programming, a new Pearlstone Campus Master Plan has been crafted. The plan will double Pearlstones's impact and engage over 40,000 annual participants, including 1,000 public school students at the Multicultural Village. The Village will feature six bunkhouses with a capacity for up to 120 students each night. The full plan will cost approximately \$15 million, with almost \$10 million already raised.

#### **Community Primary and Specialty Care Building at Sinai Hospital of Baltimore**

**\$1 million received for FY22 (\$2 million received in both FY17 and 18 and \$1 million in FY20)**

The Complex will provide wraparound patient care for children and adults with chronic health conditions. Access to high quality healthcare has never been more critical. This new complex will serve as a one stop destination for patients to see a number of providers, while increasing our region's healthcare capacity. The complex will reduce preventable emergency room visits by combining collaborative, multidisciplinary outpatient care at the primary, specialty and subspecialty levels. In turn, this will lower costs for patients and the state while increasing the health of the local community. This is the final \$1 million to be provided by the state, with \$5 million having been granted in previous years.

## OPERATING BUDGET

### SAFE Elder Abuse Program \$75,000 received for FY22

Data from the 2010 National Elder Mistreatment Study indicates that 1 in 10 respondents over the age of 60 reported abuse in 2009. (More updated data will be available following the 2020 Census.) Currently, over 18% of Marylanders are over the age of 60 and the percentage is steadily increasing. This means that over 111,000 elderly Marylanders could be experiencing abuse by a family member or caretaker every year. The Stop Abuse of Elders Program (SAFE) was established to treat and prevent elder abuse. This collaboration between agencies of The Associated provides an effective and coordinated response for victims and their families, and supplies prevention education for the community.

### Community Network: Empowering Older Adults to Thrive in Supportive Communities \$225,000 received for FY22

The Senior Friendly Neighborhoods (SFN) program began a decade ago as a pilot project with significant, but temporary, financial support from the U.S. Department of Aging. The Associated, the Maryland Department of Aging, and local foundations now fund the program, which has undergone structural changes in recent years to fulfill the needs of a growing aging community. The old model struggled with recouping expenses, as program income was limited geographically and necessitated this more sustainable model. With support from The Associated and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, in 2012 Comprehensive Housing Assistance Inc. (CHAI) (a SFN partner agency) launched the Supportive Community “Village” model, to help seniors age in place. Strong membership-based “buy-in” in the village contributes to making this model sustainable using thousands of hours of volunteer time, as well as membership-based dues structures and member-led fundraising efforts.

### Aging-in-Place for Holocaust Survivors \$350,000 received for FY22

A recent estimate indicates that approximately 600 Holocaust survivors live in the greater Baltimore metropolitan area. Jewish Community Services currently provides multiple services and supports to more than 350 Holocaust survivors and their families (a 50 person increase from FY20). The primary goal of the Baltimore Holocaust Survivors Program is to enable these elders to age in place with a sense of safety, security, comfort and community – elements of which they were deprived earlier in their lives. This is achieved by ensuring they receive all benefits, services and reparations for which they are eligible. JCS is committed to ensuring that the region’s Holocaust survivors receive culturally competent, person-centered, trauma-informed care.

### Maryland Israel Development Center (MIDC) \$300,000 received for FY22

The Maryland-Israel Development Center (MIDC) is a non-profit economic development organization that promotes job creation by facilitating bilateral trade, investment, and R&D cooperation between Maryland and Israel. MIDC was established in 1992 as a partnership of The Associated, Maryland’s

Department of Commerce, and Israel's Ministry of Industry Trade (IMIT). Currently, more than 32 Israeli companies have created their American headquarters in Maryland thanks to MIDC's various outreach efforts to Israeli cyber security and pharmaceutical companies. To continue this influx, MIDC is establishing a Maryland/Israel bi-national accelerator to help Israeli businesses find opportunities, partners and customers in the state. The accelerator held a successful pilot year, and MIDC plans to make it an annual program.

### **LifeBridge Health Diabetes Medical Home Extender Program \$250,000 received for FY22**

Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, a supporting member organization of The Associated, furnishes primary care services to uninsured and under insured community residents in its on-campus Sinai Community Care Clinic. Physician faculty and residents in Sinai's Adult Medicine Residency Program provide this care. As a direct result of the success of the program (in operation since FY14), over \$1.85 million in inpatient charges have been averted. Future program projections identify an opportunity in the next 2 years to save an additional \$900,000 at the same level of program participation, efficiency, and intended outcomes associated with the work of the Community Health Worker and Nurse team.

## **OTHER BUDGET PRIORITIES**

### **BOOST (Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today) \$10 million approved for FY22 (Increase of \$2.5 million from FY21)**

The BOOST Scholarships program provides K-12 students whose families are Free and Reduced Meals eligible an opportunity to find the best educational fit for their needs by awarding students with scholarships to attend nonpublic schools.

## **SECURITY FUNDING FOR INSTITUTIONS AT RISK OF HATE CRIMES**

### **Schools and Childcare Centers**

**\$2 million approved for FY22, Maryland Center for School Safety**

### **Places of Worship**

**\$3 million approved for FY22, Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services**

## ADVOCACY DAY PRIORITY BILLS

### *Confronting Hate and Keeping Our Communities Safe*

#### **Senate Bill 220 / House Bill 128 Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Protected Groups and Penalties (Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Vaughn Stewart)**

This bill allows a court to require an individual who is convicted of a hate crime to undergo an antibias education program, which is to be developed and administered by the University System of Maryland. It also expands the protected classes of the hate crime statute to explicitly include gender identity.

[Final Status: This bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

#### **Senate Bill 864 / House Bill 1227 Public Safety – Taskforce on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism (Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Sandy Rosenberg)**

This bill would have established the Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism. The taskforce would study ways the state can prevent domestic terrorism, hate, and other forms of extremism. After studying this issue, the taskforce would then make policy recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

[Final Status: While this bill did not receive a committee vote in either chamber, the General Assembly has included language in the state budget requiring the creation of a similar task force.](#)

#### **House Bill 418 County Boards of Education – Symbols of Hate Crimes – Policy (Delegate Michele Guyton)**

This bill would have required each county board of education to adopt a policy prohibiting the use or display of hate symbols such as a swastikas or the confederate flag. These symbols would no longer be permitted to be displayed on clothing, bags, or other materials carried by students. Similar policies have already been adopted by Howard and Carroll Counties, among other school systems in the state.

[Final Status: This bill passed the House of Delegates but did not received a vote out of committee in the State Senate.](#)

### *Protecting Renters' Rights and Preserving Telehealth Access*

#### **Senate Bill 154/ House Bill 18 Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Action – Right to Counsel (Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Wanika Fisher)**

This bill would establish the right to legal counsel for low-income tenants in rent court who are facing eviction. Additionally, it introduces a number of resources for tenants to help them know their rights throughout the eviction process, creates an Eviction Coordinator position in the Office of the Attorney General, and establishes a taskforce to study and improve tenants' access to council in Maryland.

[Final Status: An amended version of this bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

Amendments removed the explicit right to counsel, and replaced it with a system to connect tenants with the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to help them secure counsel for eviction proceedings.

## Senate Bill 3 / House Bill 123 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021 (Senator Melony Griffith and Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk)

This bill would ensure that telehealth continues to be reimbursed by insurance providers. It also removes some of the restrictions currently in place concerning telehealth. Under this bill, audio-only visits, whether via telephone or a computer, would be covered. Furthermore, any location and distance requirements would be lifted, allowing both the provider and the patient to be anywhere in the state during the time of the telehealth visit.

[Final Status: This bill passed and has been signed into law by the Governor.](#)

## OTHER PRIORITY BILLS WE SUPPORTED

*The BJC submitted testimony in support of over 75 bills, the following represents only a small sample of them.*

### Senate Bill 414 / House Bill – 583 Climate Solutions Now Act (Senator Paul Pinsky and Delegate Dana Stein)

This bill would have put the state on track to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2030, and to achieve net-zero statewide greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. Additionally, it would have set up other programs to combat the climate crisis including the planting of 5,000,000 sustainable native species trees by 2030.

[Final Status: While amended versions of this bill passed in both chambers, differences between the two versions could not be reconciled by the end of the legislative session.](#)

### Senate Bill 172 / House Bill 463 – Health Equity Resource Act (Senator Antonio Hayes and Delegate Erik Barron)

This bill would establish Health Equity Resource Communities as designated by the Department of Health. This program would incentivize healthcare and other service providers with grants and other forms of assistance, to build a presence in communities most in need. Community based nonprofit organizations including hospitals and universities, may apply on behalf of their service areas to receive this designation, after thorough state vetting.

[Final Status: This bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

### Senate Bill 674 / House Bill 1207 – Environment – Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities – Reform (Senator Sarah Elfreth and Delegate Tony Bridges)

This bill would reform the Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities so that its membership and work reflects the diversity of the state. New members of the commission would receive a full orientation on environmental justice, and the commission would also be required to hold at least one meeting each, in an urban and rural part of the state. The commission would be required to implement the use of data and advanced mapping tools in their reporting, and make recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on how to address immediate issues the state faces relating to environmental justice.

[Final Status: This bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

**Senate Bill 250 / House Bill 147 – Criminal Law  
– Sexual Crimes – Repeal of Spousal Defense  
(Senator Susan Lee and Delegate Charlotte  
Crutchfield)**

This bill would have repealed the law allowing marriage as a defense to sex crimes. Current law provides that marriage is a defense to certain sex crimes, which is based on the archaic premise that marriage was consent to sex and that a man could not rape his wife.

[Final Status: While amended versions of this bill passed in both chambers, differences between the two versions could not be reconciled by the end of the legislative session.](#)

**Senate Bill 30 / House Bill 133 – State Finance and Procurement – Appropriation Reductions  
(Board of Public Works Budget Reduction Clarification Act)  
(Senator Sarah Elfreth and Delegate Mark Korman)**

This bill would limit the Governor, with the approval of the Board of Public Works (BPW), ability to reduce an appropriation approved in the State operating budget by the legislature by no more than 25% of the total appropriation for any eight-digit program in any fiscal year. It would also require the board to wait seven calendar days after publishing a notice, before approving a proposed reduction.

[Final Status: This bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

**Senate Bill 323 / House Bill 310 – Maryland Arts Capital Grant (Senator Sarah Elfreth and  
Delegate Brooke Lierman)**

This bill would establish the Maryland Arts Capital Grant Program with a mandated \$3 million-dollar yearly appropriation in the Governor's budget. Medium and small arts and culture organizations could apply to be awarded up to \$1,000,000 for a project that would expand, renovate, or repair their facilities.

[Final Status: This bill passed and awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

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