

JAMES BROCHIN
42nd Legislative District
Baltimore County



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 221
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648

District Office
705 York Road
Towson, Maryland 21204
410-823-7087

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Dear Constituent:

The Maryland General Assembly's 2011 legislative session was marked by incremental progress toward reforming our pension system, tax and fee increases to balance the budget instead of through fiscal discipline, the passage of in-state tuition for people who are not in this country legally, and the debate over same-sex marriage. Below is a summary of how I viewed each of these issues, and just as importantly, how I voted on them.

The issue that concerned me the most was the sustainability of our public pension system. Eventually, we were able to strike a compromise that increased public employees' contribution levels from 5% to 7%, doubled their vesting time from 5 to 10 years, and decreased their multiplier. This compromise will save taxpayers millions of dollars in future years.

Despite some controversial elements in this year's state budget, it is important to note that this budget is once again balanced and will provide critical funding for our public schools. Past budgets made the new elementary school in West Towson a reality, funded the installation of air conditioning at Ridgely Middle, and also funded the much-needed addition at Hampton Elementary. Although I was disappointed that, once again, the budget raided other funds such as the Transportation Trust Fund and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, it is important to remember that the State of Maryland must by law, balance its budget, and this year was no exception.

I was disappointed that the legislature increased the alcohol sales tax. This money was supposed to fund mental health and disability programs. Had the money from the alcohol tax actually been mandated for that specific purpose, I might have supported it. However, in typical Annapolis fashion, the alcohol tax money has already been diverted to pay for a lack of funding in Baltimore City's and Prince George's County's school systems. It is difficult to support any tax increase when resulting funds will never reach the intended recipients. As a result, I voted against the alcohol tax.

Another issue that I voted against was giving in-state tuition to people who are living in the country illegally. I find this idea preposterous. The cost is a minimum of \$6 million over the next three years and could balloon to \$20 million in six years. This \$20 million could be used to hire more social workers, make our streets safer, and could be a future endowment for the education of our children. How we can spend this money on people who are not in this country legally is beyond my comprehension. The most unfair part of this legislation is that it is a slap in

the face to those who have spent years going through the proper process to get their citizenship legally.

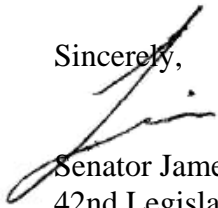
By far, one of the most difficult decisions I faced during the legislative session and in my 9 years as a legislator for that matter, was on same-sex marriage. I have always believed that same-sex couples and their kids should have the same rights as any other family. However, I questioned why we had to call it marriage. After a seven-hour hearing, I learned why. Let me begin by saying that I have always believed that homosexuality is not a choice. Furthermore, everything from health benefits to deciding where one's partner can be buried has no true legal protection unless we call it marriage. I also realized after listening to hours of testimony that same-sex couples who adopt or bear their own biological children deserve the same rights as my own family. I took an oath to provide equal protection under the law, and it became clear to me that civil unions simply cannot accomplish this.

While my decision to support same-sex marriage did not come easily, I am convinced that it was the right decision. In the end, I could not let my preconceived notions and my own uneasiness over the word "marriage" trump my commitment to provide equal protection under the law, and to allow same-sex couples to raise their families in peace, without fear of discrimination.

As you can see, this was a very challenging session, and I made my decisions based on what I believe to be sound public policy. Your support on these issues has been overwhelming, and it continues to be a true honor to represent you. If I can ever be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 410-823-7087 or via email at Jim.Brochin@senate.state.md.us.

I look forward to seeing you over the summer.

Sincerely,



Senator James Brochin
42nd Legislative District