

The following is an update of state legislation which passed during the 2014 session. They involve issues relating to safety, protection of individuals and the family, as well court and jail reforms:

***Keeping our roads safe:***

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Over the last several years, we have taken steps to ban certain forms of distracted driving including concerning the use of a cell phone. This session, we took the step to increase penalties for drivers who cause serious or fatal accidents while using a hand-held cell phone. These penalties can include up to a \$5,000 fine and up to one year in jail.

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***Protecting family pets and protecting families:***

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For the third year in a row, the General Assembly once again faced the contentious issues of how to deal with the Court of Appeals ruling in *Tracey v. Solesky*. While the General Assembly agreed on most of the bill, the two chambers differed on the burden of proof needed to show that a dog is not inherently dangerous. Working off compromises from previous sessions and the interim, the General Assembly worked together and passed legislation that will hold dog owners responsible for their dogs, while allowing for a rebuttable presumption if they can show that their dog is not inherently dangerous.

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***Creating a more sensible drug policy:***

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This year, for the second year in a row, the Senate passed legislation to create a more sensible drug enforcement policy by decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of marijuana. This legislation will help the state treat drug addiction as health issues as opposed to a criminal justice issue. As passed, this legislation will decriminalize possession of less than ten grams of marijuana and provide fines for offenders and drug counseling remedies if the court judges it necessary.

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***Protecting against discrimination:***

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This session, the legislature added gender identity to the list of classifications where discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other matters are illegal. Working together, the Senate crafted a compromise where this discrimination would be illegal, while addressing public safety concerns.

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***Better protection for victims of domestic violence:***

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This session, the legislature took action on several bills to help victims of domestic violence. After years of Senate effort, the House finally passed legislation to lower the burden of proof for peace orders and protective orders from clear and convincing evidence to preponderance of evidence. In addition, the legislature broadened the conditions under which a permanent final protective order may be granted, and increased penalties for crimes of domestic violence committed in front of minors

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***Reforming Maryland's Speed Camera System:***

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Over the last couple of years, we have seen much good from the State's speed camera system, but there have been significant problems as well. This legislation reduces the school zone sizes, allows investigations of erroneous tickets, and cracks down on contractors as well as prohibiting a bounty system for vendors.

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***Reforming Maryland's Bail system***

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Last year, the Court of Appeals ruled that Maryland's Pre-trial bail system was unconstitutional under the Maryland Constitution. This year, led by members of the Senate, the General Assembly put funds in the budget to allow courts to hire panel attorneys to represent indigent defendants. The General Assembly also considered, and the Senate passed, a system where in a computerized risk-assessment tool will be used. It is likely, that Governor O'Malley will issue an executive order to study the issue further.

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***Taking steps to secure Maryland's correctional facilities:***

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Last year, the State uncovered some mismanagement issues in the State's prison system. In response, the legislature passed a budget that increases staffing levels, upgrades cameras and video recording systems at prisons, and targets and expands anti-contraband efforts. In addition, the legislature passed legislation to streamline intelligence gathering, increases the use of polygraphs, and improves the correctional officer's bill of rights. Additionally, legislation was passed to increase penalties for contraband possession.

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***Increasing penalties for Drunk Driving:***

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This year, the legislature passed several bills to address driving while intoxicated, or under the influence. These bills included increased penalties for multiple incidents of drunk driving, increased use of ignitioninterlock for those who were drunk driving with a minor.

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The information in this message was supplied by Senator Ron Young