



County Executive Barry Glassman



STATE OF HARFORD COUNTY ADDRESS

Moving Forward Together >>>

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2020

State of the County Address - January 14, 2020

Moving Forward Together ...

Major General Kilgo, Colonel Druell, Council Members, cabinet members and my fellow Harford County Citizens, it's indeed a pleasure for me to bring you my annual State of Harford County address.

I am confident to say that Harford County has regained the standing it had prior to the great recession.

Through a combination of making hard choices, like right sizing the county workforce and holding the line on capital projects; and fostering a local environment which is conducive to sustainable growth; as we enter 2020, our outlook has improved considerably. As a result, my administration has returned

the fund balance back to normal levels, and we have continued to retain our triple A bond rating (AAA) which only 2% of counties have nationwide.

Through strong fiscal management, we have restored county employee pay raises for 5 years, implemented a new pay plan for our deputies and correctional officers, which I hope to complete this year, and funded education budgets so that all of our teachers and staff are caught up on their missed steps during the recession and have received pay raises for the past 5 years. For the second year in a row we paid off more debt than we took on, which includes the opening of the Havre de Grace Middle/High School later this year hopefully just in time for my 40th Class reunion...

I want to thank my staff, county employees and council because it has required fiscal discipline and management to get here.

In fact as we enter 2020, we are one of the handful of suburban counties which has managed such a grand turnaround without leveling new or increased taxes on their families.

Together we have adopted a plan that simply manages our revenue and expenditures, and stresses efficiency and customer service every day, while providing smart and targeted growth strategies in our local economy. Revenues, long flat or with anemic growth, are growing at the fastest rate in years.

I would add a word of caution here. As our revenues grow, albeit mostly one-time revenues, there will be a temptation to further accelerate spending. We are in the longest economic expansion ever and most economists say it is not a

matter of “if” but just “when” we see some flattening or downturn in growth. With international events and general dysfunction in Washington, there is a lot of uncertainty out there. It flows down to the state level in Annapolis, where this year’s debate over the Kirwan plan will most likely levy 1.3 billion dollars on Maryland counties for an increased education spending contribution to a 4 billion dollar plan. The speaker of the house appointed me to the formula committee over the summer to help update Maryland’s funding formulas for the state and local jurisdictions. Based on very rosy projections, Harford’s additional cost with teacher pensions would be around 10 million dollars at the end of the phase-in. Other jurisdictions would pay much more but our impact has been softened by our local effort and level of funding around 50% of local dollars, ranking us 13th in the State. In fact, our local increase was the 4th highest increase in Maryland last year. Of course, Kirwan funding is due to be debated by the legislature and may change by April. I have begun to set aside some assigned fund balance to be in a better position to fund this program which I do believe will pass in some form. My experience from the State and local levels is that local governments will most likely be in the familiar position of having to increase their funding levels, while at the same time absorbing State funding cuts and shifts. Either way, I plan to be in a position to continue making record increases in our education system.

Henry Ford said, “If everyone is moving forward together then success takes care of itself.”

Our success is also occurring in partnership with the private sector with my Administration assisting 500 new or expanding businesses, creating over

4,000 net new jobs, with \$549 million dollars in capital investment and 7 million square feet of new space. Building on the success from the Ground Floor incubator on Route 40, our agri-business incubator, The Grove, is under construction at the Ag Center.

In addition, APG, our largest employer, is the new think tank of the Army and continues to grow its mission sets. The Army Futures Command is a two star command, which is equivalent economically to a Fortune 500 company. I have enjoyed building a new relationship with Major General Kilgo and Colonel Druell. As a Great American defense community we not only enjoy our economic partnership but thank you for your service to the cause of freedom and the work APG does to protect our American warfighters across this dangerous world. Army Strong... Harford Strong.

On the battlefield of the opioid crisis, I have become cautiously optimistic, as you know when I was sworn in 5 years ago I pledged that we would come out of the dark and shed a light on this devastating epidemic. Since then Harford County has become a leader in Maryland with several award-winning efforts. The State's numbers from a couple weeks ago show our progress with a 32.8% reduction in fatalities, the highest of any of Maryland's big seven jurisdictions. This is due to a lot of hard work and our partnerships with Sheriff Gahler and his public safety personnel, our amazing and under-appreciated Health Department, our first responders, our unique relationships with ACR [Addiction Connections Resource], Rage Against Addiction and so many more... my own staff in Community Services and I must include folks in the faith community who have

sent up prayers for the ones we've lost and those we have led to recovery. We will not rest but continue to shine a light on recovery and expand our efforts to help survivors heal and rebuild their lives. Our first of its kind Klein Family Harford Crisis Center for behavioral health and addiction is completing its startup year serving close to 1,200 guests since June and more than 5,000 hotline calls since October of 2018. We are working hard to make sure patients get the appropriate insurance coverage when using the center. In order to create a model, I have directed that all County employees and dependents be covered for services at the Center regardless of when they show up. I am also continuing my work to lower prescription drug costs for our seniors and working families across Maryland so they don't have to choose between getting their medications and paying for living expenses. Just last year the County paid 3.5 million dollars for prescriptions of just ten specialty drugs.

I intend to stick to this year's theme of Moving Forward Together, as we move through the New Year. Most of you know of my study of President Lincoln and one of my favorite quotes is, "I may sometimes move slowly going forward but I never go backwards."

With this in mind I am pleased to announce some partnerships which are the first of their kind in the County.

Over the past five years, we have funded our stormwater obligation at 52 million dollars and completed 23 projects to maintain compliance with Maryland mandates. To build on our commitment, I'd like to welcome Mayor of Havre De

Grace Bill Martin as we announce the State's first Municipal/County/DNR partnership where the County will contribute up to \$500,000 towards the completion of the City's Living Shoreline project.

Living Shoreline is a national model for coastal resiliency and ecosystem restoration. One that will, through a nature-based approach, provide tremendous water quality improvements and habitat uplift, and are on track to meet our goals and help restore the Susquehanna River shoreline along the City of Havre de Grace and Upper Bay.

On the public safety front, our county medics continue to assist our volunteers and have handled over 3,000 EMS calls this year and saved countless lives. There is growing concern among our local companies, and frankly fire and EMS leaders statewide, as volunteer numbers continue to fall.

To help attract new community fire and EMS providers, I will be implementing Maryland's first student loan debt repayment program for college graduates who serve as volunteer fire or EMS responders in the community. My program called Harford's NEXT GEN Responder is modeled around a proposal by State Representative Chris Sainato and working its way through the Pennsylvania legislature. After reaching the required number of service points, college graduates who volunteer as first responders will be eligible for \$5,000 a year toward student loan debt, repayment up to \$20,000. In addition, I have directed that the County's current tuition reimbursement program include fire courses as well as EMS.

To further supplement our local fire service, I am announcing the first public/private partnership with Abingdon Volunteer Fire Company to finance and construct a new substation in Riverside to be managed and operated by the Company and jointly house Harford County units and personnel along with Co. 4 units. Together we all share the goal of serving our citizens in their moments of need.

In closing, I am so proud of our citizens who have opened their hearts to our Choose Civility campaign. This year we held the first of our annual Longest Table events, where we broke bread and broke down barriers. Instead of dividing people by their politics, race and religion, Harford County is choosing to build bridges. With acts of kindness and tolerance, we are uniting in our common humanity. I want to thank Mary Hastler and the Harford County Library for their outstanding partnership, plus the nearly 50 local agencies, nonprofits and businesses that have joined our cause. Together, we are making Harford County a model of civility for the state and the nation. The haters will not prevail here.

And as we celebrate Reverend King's birthday this coming Monday, we will also continue our Day of Service program but also remember his challenge:

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward" ... and indeed Harford County ... we will move forward together in this new decade.

Thank you and God Bless.