

January 4, 2008

To: Sen. Norman Stone  
Del. Eric Bromwell  
Senators and Delegates of Baltimore County



We know the past few months have been difficult for you and the other members of the Baltimore County delegation to the General Assembly. And, if it is any comfort to you, they have not been easy for the Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce either. We recognized that the structural deficit was real and that sacrifice was required with the question being “who and how much?” After some debate the Chamber concluded that the answer should embody the following three principles. First, the solution should employ “equality of sacrifice,” meaning that *at least* 50 percent of the solution should be derived from government cost reduction initiatives. Second, the session should limit its efforts to solving the \$1.7 million problem and not embark on other initiatives best left for the General Session. Third, legislation should not be enacted that adversely impacts the job creating power of business. Obviously, some principles were employed, others were not.

As we did with the Special Session, the purpose of this letter is to outline our positions for the upcoming General Session.

**The first priority of the Baltimore County Chamber is fiscal responsibility, including taxes.** For the past four years, we have supported the passage of legislation authorizing slots, with proceeds being used to support education and the horse industry. And we will actively support approval of the referendum, albeit with a word of caution. We urge the administration and the General Assembly to limit the proceeds to their originally intended objectives of (1) education and (2) the horse industry. Second, the Baltimore County Chamber strongly opposes both the tax and the process leading to the tax on computer services. We are asking you for a repeal of the computer services tax. The question follows how then will the state cover the \$200 million shortfall? Following the principles previously stated, at least 50 percent should come from cost reductions and the balance from revenue generating sources that pass the test of the “light of day.”

**Our second priority is health care.** Affordable health care is a critical issue for Baltimore County employers and, we might add, their employees. In addressing this issue, the Baltimore County Chamber supports the Maryland State Chamber’s six-point plan for health care spending including:

- 1) Promoting plans that support consumer directed health care decisions
- 2) Requiring uninsured higher income individuals to purchase health insurance
- 3) Greater use of Section 125 plans
- 4) Medical liability reform
- 5) Small group reform
- 6) Review of mandates and underwriting requirements

Maryland also faces a medical provider shortage, particularly nurses. Studies have shown that the underlying cause for the shortage of nurses is the lack of training infrastructure, especially nurse educators. The Chamber, working with you and the medical community, will seek alternatives for remedying this problem.

**Our third priority is education and workforce training.** Access to high quality primary, secondary, adult and higher education is a vital concern for Maryland’s business community because it is the feeder system for developing and maintaining a highly qualified workforce. While much progress has been made in providing the necessary funding for education, systemic issues must still be resolved if we are to meet the future workforce needs of business. The current state formula for educational facilities construction and renovation is designed to meet *yesterday’s* needs. The system must be changed to a model that forward funds

for the students of tomorrow. We oppose efforts to abolish school choice and to enact caps in higher education. And, in recognition of changing workforce needs influenced by BRAC, the Chamber supports the expansion of adult education initiatives.

**Our fourth priority is economic development**, an area which falls largely under the domain of county government. The Chamber believes that the four-year Comprehensive Zoning Map Process is a flawed process, one that is not sufficiently influenced by the county's long-term economic development goals and population trends. It provides at best only a three year window on zoning certainty. We recommend that the CZMP be changed to a six-year cycle. The Chamber recommends that Baltimore County complete an inventory of remaining commercially zoned land and an estimate of its development capacity before the next CZMP. We support the Planned Urban Development and Renaissance Development processes and encourages businesses to utilize the Green Building Tax Credit to save energy and mitigate environmental impact.

**Our fifth priority is economic well-being and energy.** We will work closely with legislative leaders and regulators to seek balanced solutions in these two areas, which will allow businesses to operate and grow. We support tax incentives for alternative energy sources and green initiatives and the promotion of market based solutions that facilitate a reduction in energy consumption. We oppose regulations mandating the adoption of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for new or refurbished buildings.

**Our sixth priority is transportation.** At the top of our list of transportation priorities is the Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore. We will actively support steps necessary to ensure that the Port remains an indispensable tool of business and a job creator for our region. Steps must also be taken to maintain commercial zoning in areas where transportation infrastructure already exists and to find cost effective measures to reduce congestion along the I-83 corridor. Finally, we will work with elected officials and regulators to identify incentives promoting telecommuting and alternative means of transportation.

**Our seventh and final priority is workforce regulation.** The Chamber believes that it is to the government's benefit to foster an employment market that is competitive, provides a safe and supportive working environment and does not impose undue burden upon employers. In support of this objective, we oppose minimum wage mandates and support voluntary paid-leave policies, respect for federal ERISA law and maintaining existing tort law standards.

The Chambers' 700 member companies, who employ half of the Baltimore County workforce, represent the voice of business in Baltimore County. Through this letter, we have spoken. The Chamber, through our Legislative Committee, is ready, willing and able to advocate on behalf of the priorities listed in this letter during any phase of the legislative process.

We truly believe that a better community is created when business and government work together.

Sincerely,

Keith Scott  
President  
Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce