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Patrick Moran - President

Testimony
HB 1332 – State Budget
Appropriations
March 10, 2020
Support

AFSCME strongly supports HB 1332. This amendment to the Maryland Constitution would modify the State budget process by allowing the General Assembly to increase appropriations made by the Governor and add additional appropriations for Executive Branch agencies, though not to exceed the total allowance as originally submitted by the Governor. The Governor can veto any increase or item added by the General Assembly, and if the Governor does so, the General Assembly may convene in an extraordinary session within 30 days after the Governor’s action to consider the vetoed items, provided the session solely considers action on the budget vetoes.

Maryland is alone in having the legislature – by logical definition the appropriating vehicle of government – engaged in such a limited way as to the development and execution of a state’s spending priorities. Money can’t be added, nor can money be reassigned from one area of spending to another.

This process, dating back to the early part of the 20th century, creates an inability for the tools of negotiation and compromise to be effectively employed – but it does create incentive to mandate spending and sharpen ideological differences. We find ourselves today in an environment where partisanship fosters talking past each other versus engagement to find common ground. For example, both the Governor and the General Assembly have stated that addressing understaffing in the Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services is a priority. In 2019 the General Assembly set aside \$7 million specifically for recruitment and retention of correctional officers. The Governor chose to withhold the expenditure of those funds, with no legislative recourse. If this amendment had been in place, there would have been a legislative reallocation, with the ability for the Governor to veto that reallocation – and then an ability of the Legislature to override that veto if they chose to do so. This process, much closer to the typical process of U.S. state governments, is logical and fair.

HB 1332 would restore a balance of powers to the executive and legislative branches when it comes to determining Maryland’s spending priorities. AFSCME Council 3 asks for a favorable report of HB 1332.

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