

March 17, 2026

Maryland General Assembly
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 696, which seeks to reinstate the prescription drug benefit for State of Maryland retirees. With over 38 years of dedicated service to the State of Maryland and more than 44 years in education at all levels (P-16+), I have devoted my career to public service and the advancement of our state's citizens, teaching students from elementary through graduate school in our State's public schools and universities.

When I began my service—and as recently as the many State-led retirement workshops I had attended prior to my retirement in 2015 (after there had apparently already been a plan to change our Rx benefit!), the State of Maryland **assured** employees that a prescription drug benefit would be an integral part of our retirement package. **Never were we told by the State's representatives who ran these workshops that this benefit was not going to be ours anymore.** In retrospect, I, and my fellow retirees, now feel as if we were lied to by those with whom we had contracts and trusted. This promise was a decisive factor for many, including myself, in choosing state employment and remaining committed to it for decades. We contributed to this benefit throughout our careers, with the expectation that it would be there for us in retirement.

The removal of the prescription drug benefit has caused a significant hardship. The rising cost of prescription medications is now unaffordable for many retirees who live on fixed incomes. This change has placed an unexpected and unfair financial burden on those who have given so much to our state. Even though we were awarded a VIA benefits card for \$750, many of us have already capped out on this amount and are hundreds of dollars over, including myself, and it is only March! Drug costs are out of sight!

I respectfully urge you to act in support of HB 696. Restoring this benefit will honor the commitment made to Maryland's public servants, protect retirees from undue financial strain, and reinforce the trust that state employees place in their government.

Thank you for considering my perspective and for your service to the people of Maryland.

Most sincerely,

Karen A. Verbeke Shealey (former special education and mathematics teacher and teacher educator)
Salisbury, Maryland

