



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

March 4, 2026

Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Guzzone, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

As the Frederick County Executive, I write to urge the committee to pass a Budget and Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act that addresses the budget deficit with the least amount of harm to local governments.

As proposed, the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026 (BRFA) once again strains already tight local budgets by pushing a large amount of state liabilities to county governments. These cost shifts make it increasingly difficult for counties to maintain county-run services and infrastructure for our communities, while also fulfilling increasingly expensive state mandates such as the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. This comes following FY26, in which counties were required to pick up state cost shifts and adjust budgets to account for these increases.

As the fastest growing county in the state, Frederick County struggles to meet the needs of our residents while managing a balanced budget. This is particularly relevant in our school funding, as we are the fastest growing school system in Maryland. The BRFA recommends pushing 50% of K-12 retirement cost increases to counties, along with 50% of community college and library retirement cost increases. These cost shifts will be detrimental to County education budgets, and lead to tough choices when planning for school funding. This BRFA also proposes capping enrollment-driven State aid growth for community colleges at 3% annually for FY27 to FY29. This is during a time of workforce demand, which community colleges are essential to combating as they offer quality higher education for all Marylanders.

Frederick County consistently funds our schools above the required maintenance of effort (MOE,) but with income tax revenues plateauing in recent years and revenue from building permits decreasing, it is increasingly difficult to meet the budget needs of our county services and fund beyond MOE. With these cost shifts, Frederick County would likely only be able to fund at the MOE level, further exasperating overcrowding in our school systems. While Frederick County is in a unique position as the fastest growing school system, other jurisdictions will also struggle to absorb these cost shifts without making cuts to services.

As a county leader who is strongly committed to the promises of Blueprint for Maryland's Future, these cost shifts are deeply concerning. The State made a promise when passing the Blueprint, and these unreasonable cost shifts undermine counties' ability to work in partnership towards that promise. I respectfully request that your committee reevaluate these cost shifts and

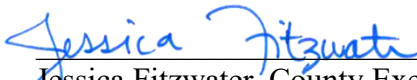
consider the impact that they may have on a county's ability to implement and maintain Blueprint programs.

The proposed BRFA also includes a provision to require counties to reimburse the state for assisted outpatient treatment programs if the State establishes the county program. While the payment is phased in, counties would still be required to cover 100% of these costs by FY31. When the State passed legislation to establish these programs, counties were not required to reimburse the State for standing them up. By shifting this cost to counties, the State is passing along an unfunded mandate at a time when budgets are already constrained.

My administration is also concerned with the proposal to expand the allowable uses of the 9-1-1 Trust Fund to cover ongoing program operations at the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. This fund is currently used by counties to fund county emergency communications systems, a crucial service in our communities. Counties cannot afford to fund these systems alone and heavily rely on this fund to ensure the essential service can function without lapses or failure. Allowing MDEM to dip into a 9-1-1 Trust Fund established for county emergency systems would put local governments and communities at risk, especially during a time in which counties are anticipating increasing cost shifts. Additionally, if the State diverts 9-1-1 fees for uses that are not associated with 9-1-1, Maryland would be flagged by the federal government as a diverter, making the State ineligible for several different types of federal funding. The State cannot put the safety of our communities at risk to account for individual departmental shortfalls.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 284. I urge you to pass a BRFA and Budget package that prioritizes partnership without placing additional budgetary burdens on local governments.

Sincerely,



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD