
MARYLAND GOVERNMENT

Maryland government is based on a written compact known as the Constitution of Maryland. The State has had four constitutions, each containing a declaration of rights—the State’s bill of rights. Maryland’s first constitution was adopted during the Revolutionary War in 1776, the second in 1851, and the third in 1864. The fourth and present constitution was adopted in 1867. It consists of a declaration of rights, the Constitution proper, and those amendments ratified to date.

The source of all power and authority for governing the State of Maryland lies with its citizens. The Constitution’s Declaration of Rights makes clear “That all Government of right originates from the People, is founded in compact only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole; and they have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter, reform or abolish their Form of Government in such manner as they may deem expedient.” (Art. 1)

While responsibility for promoting the public interest is vested in specific officers and agencies of State government, actual governing authority remains with the registered voters of Maryland. A registered voter must be eighteen years of age or older, a citizen of the United States, and a resident of Maryland thirty days prior to the date of an election.

Believing that it would be too cumbersome for all persons to participate directly in the operation of government, framers of the Constitution of 1867 followed precedent established in earlier Maryland constitutions by delegating power to elected representatives. They also continued to separate powers of government into three distinct branches which exercise certain checks and balances on each other.

The three branches of State government—executive, legislative, and judicial—act to preserve, protect, and extend the privileges and obligations provided to the citizens of Maryland by the State Constitution. All three represent the interests of the citizens of the State in their relations with other states and the federal government, and each works closely with and supplements the services of municipal and county administrations. Checks and balances provided by the Constitution of Maryland ensure a certain beneficial degree of tension and proprietorship among the three branches of State government, and each carefully guards its prerogatives. The fundamental goal of State government as a whole, however, is to serve the public interest. Through periodic elections, referenda, and amend-

ments to the Constitution, citizens ultimately determine the policies, functions, and extent of the government of the State of Maryland.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Executive Branch implements and enforces Maryland’s laws and provides executive direction to government. It consists of various constitutional and statutory officers and agencies. Its chief executive officer is the Governor, elected by the voters to a four-year term each even-numbered year that is not a presidential election year. The Governor is responsible for ensuring that Maryland’s laws are executed effectively; that certain appointments as provided by the Constitution or by law are made; and that a budget is presented annually to the legislature. As commander in chief of the military, the Governor sees that the armed forces of the State are able to meet any emergency. The Governor appoints judges to the State judiciary and may veto legislation passed by the legislature. The Governor is assisted by the Lieutenant Governor, who is elected on a joint ballot with the gubernatorial candidate. Duties of the Lieutenant Governor are limited to those assigned by the Governor. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor each must be at least thirty years old and a resident and voter of Maryland for the five years immediately preceding election.

Other statewide executive officers also are provided for in the Constitution. The Comptroller of the Treasury superintends the fiscal affairs of the State. The State Treasurer accounts for all deposits and disbursements to or from the State treasury. The Secretary of State attests to the Governor’s signature on all public documents and oversees all executive orders, commissions, and appointments. The Attorney General serves as legal counsel to the Governor, the legislature, and all State departments, boards, and most commissions. The voters elect the Comptroller and Attorney General. The Treasurer is selected by joint ballot of both houses of the General Assembly, and the Secretary of State is appointed by the Governor. Each of these executive officers serves a four-year term.

An important agency of the executive department is the Board of Public Works, composed of the Governor, the Comptroller, and the Treasurer. The Board approves all sums expended through State loans, most capital improvements, and the sale, lease, or transfer of all real property owned by the State.