



Governor Wes Moore 2023 State of the State Address

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Good afternoon.

Madame Speaker, Mr. President, members of the General Assembly, members of our Congressional delegation, colleagues in state and local government, and my fellow Marylanders...

For almost three years, I have traveled our state, talking to Marylanders from every region, every race, every creed, in many of your districts, and I listened to what they had to say. Some of the voices we heard are here today, but all of the voices I heard ring in my heart, my head, and my memories.

Marylanders are worried about our economy, and whether it can keep pace with the cost-of-living. We worry about safety in our communities. Families struggle to find affordable child care and Pre-K. People of all ages get lost in the maze of behavioral health crises and trauma.

Yet, despite the challenges, the Marylanders I talked to were not only fast to offer solutions but expressed a deep desire to be part of the solution.

They were the first to organize a food drive at their local school. They raised their hands to watch the kids in the neighborhood. They agreed to serve on the board of a local non profit. They are willing to work in our local government and our state government.

In short, Marylanders are ready to serve.

I am only here right now because of people in my life who stepped up even when they were not called. People who served, even if they did not call it that. People who were willing to sacrifice in the moment for the hope of a better tomorrow.

The teachers, who gave me the tools to think for myself. The coaches who pushed me, even when I wanted to stop. The ministers who prayed for me and my family, even when there was no clear path forward. And the school counselors who helped me see a horizon I was not ready to see for myself.

This state is full of those individuals. People who refuse to quit, who lift you up when you are down, and who will spark a light in yourself even if it only glimmers in the dark.

This state was built by them. Built by people who stepped up to serve.

They are the educators, who get up before the crack of dawn, and stay after dark, to make sure their students get the extra help they need.

They are the linemen, who after a disaster, work double shifts to ensure we can turn our lights back on.

And yes, it's the lawmaker who gets up and comes to Annapolis, who sacrifices time with their family, months from their business, the ones who choose to step into the arena despite knowing the ridicule that oftentimes comes along with it, hoping to leave this state a little better than they found it.

Whether you are in Oakland or Ocean City, in Hagerstown or Havre de Grace, one of the things we can all agree on, is that we've got work to do.

This is a state where the opportunities are boundless, but the challenges are undeniable.

It is also a state where there is no obstacle we cannot address, no challenge we cannot tackle, if we are intentional, move in partnership, and commit to promoting service as a state ideal.

I only realized recently, Service, the word, comes from the Latin, *servitium*, which meant "slavery." It is fitting as the first African American to deliver this speech, in a building that was built by the hands of enslaved people, that we are now putting "service" towards the good of all.

The irony is that it is service that will help save us.

On day one of my administration, I ordered the creation of the Department of Service and Civic Innovation. This was not a stunt. This was not because it sounded nice. This was because it is a fundamental part of who I am, and it's in the DNA of this state.

Our order consolidates and elevates the agencies of state government that support service opportunities. We need to follow it with legislation, The Serve Act, that will create a Service Year Option. While our young people give back, they also lay the foundation for their future success through job training and mentorship programs, and create a lifelong habit of service to our state. Something we so desperately need.

Whether they're preparing our state for climate change, tutoring our students, or caring for the sick, young people should have the option to perform important service today and build a foundation for our shared future.

This is the first effort of its kind in the nation, and Maryland will lead the way.

Some may ask, "Why is this important? Why should state government do this?"

Because, and you've heard me say this before, service is sticky.

Service, will save us.

It will save us money, through a more strategic plan and better use of resources.

Building a workforce of dedicated public servants saves us the expense of costly contractors and external vendors, and if properly managed, delivers us better results.

Spending \$100 million on inefficiencies and patchwork politics is not the way to run a government.

We have the assets, we need to harness them. That's what my plan does.

It will save us time by adding urgency, because our people will be more involved in their state government and helping one another, expediting the changes we know we need.

And it will save one another.

At a time when civic bonds are frayed, where many feel more disconnected from their neighbors than ever before, service is the antidote to the epidemic of loneliness and otherness.

Service is how we re-engage our people in the project of forming a more perfect state.

It's time we confront the demagoguery of false choices. The idea that if one group of people wins, another must lose. Or that when a political party loses an election, they are excluded from the process of governing for the next four years.

Our administration has put forth a plan to make historic investments in people, AND it spends \$1 billion less than the last fiscal year.

We made the largest investment in public education by any governor in our state's history AND introduced \$200 million in targeted tax relief for children in poverty with the Family Prosperity Act and veterans in retirement with the Keep our Heroes home act.

We put forward a plan to make Maryland the first state to end child poverty, AND we kept 10% in the rainy day fund.

Let's put an end to the belief that we cannot invest in the future today, while also preparing for the uncertainty of tomorrow. It's Just. Not. True.

Service, public service, is what will help our state reach its full potential.

Tens of thousands of government workers throughout our state serve our people. They do so despite the fact the pay could be better, the incoming complaints could be fewer, the challenges could be easier.

They do it, because, like you and I, they love our state.

Today, I want to point out one of those workers today, someone you all may know.

Judy Roopnaraine was born in D.C. but raised in Maryland. For the last 8 years, she has been a fixture in the State House, a part of the Department of General Services ensuring these hallowed halls always look their best. Her strong work ethic, infectious personality, and willingness to go the extra mile make her a beloved part of the team. In fact, she's a natural leader, taking on more responsibility, and learning basic maintenance and repairs so she might one day soon become a DGS Maintenance Mechanic.

Nearly a decade of service to our state, working in this very building, and Today is the first time Judy has watched a State of the State. Please join me in applauding her years of service.

And she is representative of so many state workers, who are serving without a full team beside them. The team they need and deserve. The support the people of Maryland need and deserve.

Right now, Maryland's government has nearly 10,000 vacancies, with just under 6,100 in the executive branch alone. That means needs are not being met. It means timelines for licensing and approvals are closer to the 19th century, than the 21st. It prevents our people from opening small businesses, from keeping our communities safe while welcoming back those who have paid their debts to society, from getting Marylanders the healthcare they need.

This isn't about creating "big government." This is about creating a better one.

That means eliminating and consolidating the positions no longer needed, and filling the ones we desperately do.

It's why I am proud that my budget makes state government a more attractive place to work, with competitive wage increases to fill positions like registered nurses, attorneys, and emergency response technicians.

Because our workforce, both public and private, is the key to our state's future.

Study after study tells us the same thing.

Every business across the country says their number one factor for relocation, for growing their companies where they are, is a trained and educated workforce.

This isn't something we need to create from scratch. That workforce already exists. The state just needs to strategically use its assets and resources to unlock its potential.

That starts with education. We can no longer separate our vision for economic prosperity from our duty to make Maryland public schools the best in the nation. The two are inextricably linked.

overworked – and they need reinforcements, here and now. That is why I am calling on the General Assembly to pass the Maryland Educator Shortage Act – to strengthen the pipeline of qualified teachers in our state.

This bill will create new pathways to address the shortage of qualified teachers, giving our students the mentors and leaders they need to explore the full range of opportunities in emerging sectors.

Maybe no Marylander exemplifies the untapped potential of this type of policy than Ronnie Beard.

Ronnie grew up in Frederick, and now teaches at Oakdale High School. Originally, he was planning on becoming a juvenile counselor, but while studying at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, determined he wanted to help kids avoid problems before they ever start. Through Maryland's "Grow Your Own" program, he was introduced to the profession and he received a scholarship for part of his tuition and internship. He's now a leader in Frederick, helping to recruit more talented educators to step into the gap.

Ronnie: Thank you for your service to Maryland's children.

Ronnie's story of using an alternative pathway towards a rewarding profession is a guide to how we grow our state.

Our state government has begun to accept real-world experience as a substitute for a college education. This is a smart, common sense approach to allow all Marylanders to serve. But we must go further. To rebuild state government, and to give all Marylanders an opportunity to be a part of it, my administration will be looking at current standards to make sure they meet the requirements for the jobs we must fill.

And while Maryland is home to some of the world's greatest institutions of higher education — a fact of which we should be very proud — we must end the myth that young people must attend one of them to be successful.

That doesn't have to be the path for every student – it wasn't my path.

Today, we have a remarkable young man with us who exemplifies why.

Jefferson Vasquez-Reyes is a freshman at Montgomery College. Like me, he is on path to graduate from a two-year college. Like myself and our extraordinary Lieutenant Governor, he is the child of immigrants who came to Maryland for a better life. They had to forego their education due to war and homelessness in El Salvador.

As a 12 year old child, he became the patient advocate for his mother, and his grandmother, who were in-and-out of the hospital frequently. Witnessing the power of a doctor who understands his family's culture, and was able to communicate with his grandmother in her native tongue, he has decided to step up and serve his community by becoming a doctor. Thanks to scholarships and state funding, he is on his way, tuition free, to achieving his dream.

Let's please honor his determination, and his commitment to our state. Jefferson, please stand.

An education can take many forms. I saw that in the military, where I learned the life skills on leadership, discipline, and determination from the soldiers I served with, and beside.

And along those lines, we cannot talk about service, without talking about veterans and military families.

American service members and their families have taken an oath to protect the Constitution, left their families to guard the nation, and put their lives on the line to defend our freedom. If you are a veteran please stand now so we can recognize your service.

I'd like to quickly note that we had people standing from both sides of the aisle. That no party has the market cornered on patriotism or sacrifice.

We stand for people like Angela McCullough.

Angela is a retired US Air Force Master Sergeant, and the owner and CEO of Maryland-based, Tri-Logistics.

and geography help set her company up for success.

She's an example of what our state needs more of. With my budget's \$40,000 exemption on military retirement, she will be able to put that money back into her business, hire more people, and grow our economy.

And 40,000 veterans like her will see their retirement income tax cut as well.

Angela, please stand so we can recognize your continued service to our great state.

The challenge has always been that many veterans do their service here, but choose to live their lives elsewhere. Maryland should be no state's farm team.

If we are serious about growing our economy, it begins by making Maryland the best state to be a veteran. They are lifelong contributors, and lifelong taxpayers.

With more than 362,000 veterans, it's not something we can just get to tomorrow; it's an imperative for our state today.

The time to make this happen is now. Together we will get this done.

During eight years of rising violent crime, law enforcement stepped into the gap to keep our communities safe.

But we have also seen unacceptable rates of incarceration for young black men, and neighborhoods fearful of both the criminals, and the forces sworn to protect them.

To paraphrase F. Scott Fitzgerald, buried in Rockville, Maryland, we must hold these two contradicting ideas together at the same time, and be determined to make them otherwise.

Someone here today does just that, every day.

Marsha Briley is a resident of Baltimore County, and works in Anne Arundel. For 27 years, she has worked in the Department of Corrections, the Anne Arundel Police Department, and now at the Anne Arundel detention center. Her work, in short, is to be a guide, a mentor, and a friend, to those who have served their time and are now re-entering society. She helps them build relationships and develop life skills so they can succeed, whether it's workforce training or learning to drive.

But she does more than that. If they need a safe place to stay, she locates a home. If they are in need of clothes, she finds them a jacket. Her impact is measured by the people she helps get back on their feet, and frankly, that's an untold amount of good, for them, and for us all.

Marsha, please stand up so we can all applaud the work you do every day to make Maryland a better place.

These men and women deserve our gratitude, and our respect, and let us thank them with more than just applause; let's thank them with action.

We can increase salaries to recruit and retain corrections and parole officers. It is why our budget calls for more than \$30 million to get our state more staff and resident advisors for juveniles. These workers help people ensure those re-entering society are successful, and give back to it. This will not only make us safer; it will make us stronger.

As will this final piece I want to touch on today. A collective, bipartisan pledge to end child poverty in the state of Maryland.

No group deserves our help more than the children of Maryland. In a state with the highest median income in the country, one in eight children lives in poverty.

How can we expect them to fill their minds with ideas, if they can't fill their stomachs with food? How will they rise above their station, if they are in a constant state of deprivation?

We can, and we will, end child poverty in the state of Maryland.

I know this is an audacious goal. I know there will be skeptics. And some people say this can't be done, because this is all they have ever known.

But today, we can make a decision, that we will refuse to accept that, and Maryland will lead the way.

Today, we have someone here today who shines a light on the possibilities before us if we achieve this goal.

Ryan Hemminger, is the Chief Financial Officer of one of Maryland's most successful, and impactful, technology companies. He also co-founded a social enterprise organization that brings young people facing the most significant opportunity and achievement gaps across the divide.

Many of you know Ryan as an accomplished business leader, a dedicated mentor, and strong partner with our communities.

What's less known is the fact that he also grew up in crippling poverty. His parents battled a pain pill addiction, and his grades suffered. He went from being an A-student to almost dropping out, until a handful of caring teachers stepped into his life to become an extended family: they brought him breakfast, helped with his laundry, tutored him after school.

He went on to the Naval Academy before settling in Maryland. For nearly twenty years, Ryan and his wife Sarah have supported hundreds of our most economically vulnerable young people as they work to find their way to a better life.

His community stepped in, he stepped up, and now he serves our state with grace and humility.

Ryan, my dear friend, please stand so we can all recognize your contributions to our state.

The challenge of stories like Ryan's childhood are that they are far too common. The promise of his adulthood is far too uncommon. There are legislators here today whose remarkable and improbable journeys mirror Ryan's, where their success stories serve more as exceptions than the norm.

Ending child poverty is not complicated; and the tools already exist to get us on our way. There is no partisanship when it comes to a child in need, so let's not allow us to fall into our traditional corners on the issue.

Permanently extending the enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit and expanding the Child Tax Credit is how we begin. This push will make nearly 40,000 families eligible for one of the most successful child poverty tools this country has ever seen. By reducing the number of children living in poverty, and the severity of poverty, we are changing what has long determined a kid's future before they even get a say.

And this helps everyone. For every dollar invested in credits like these, there are up to ten dollars in economic benefit and a range of improved outcomes for communities, from higher-quality children's health to reduced crime rates.

If we do this, and we raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, and index it to inflation, we can lift more than 152,000 children in Maryland to the next rung of the economic ladder.

We can get this done, and change the trajectory of our state for generations to come.

We can set up our children to win the next decade, if we get rid of policies that don't force hundreds of thousands of our children to lose.

I want to end my remarks by taking a moment to reflect.

It's easy to get lost in the finer points of policy, or the politics of turning bills into law. It's definitely possible to get lost in the frenetic energy of Maryland's legislative session.

Whether you have served in elected office for decades, or whether you are new to this game.

What I called for over the last twenty minutes or so weren't Democratic beliefs. They weren't really partisan at all.

They weren't urban or rural. They didn't apply solely to the shore or to the mountains. Because the same hope to end child poverty is just as strong in Baltimore as it is in Boonsboro. Economic mobility has a home in Dorchester, just as it does in Dickerson. Making our government more effective and efficient is an ideal held in Harford and in Howard.

These are all collective goals, and collective ideas, and the only way we will accomplish them, is collectively.

We are here, serving together, because we believe a career in service is a difference-making profession. We all want what's best for the people we represent.

This is the righteous core of politics. This is the essence of why we do the work.

And it is why I am now asking you for your help. You believe in this work, so I know, many of the people around you do as well.

I cannot do this alone. We cannot do it alone.

If we are going to execute on this vision, if we are going to make this state work again, we need people willing to serve.

We need talented individuals who put the whole before the self. We need folks, like you.

In the days, weeks, months, and years ahead, I will be calling on your partnership to find, recruit, and elevate public service as a calling in Maryland. And we're off to a great start.

In the last two weeks, 2,833 people have applied to join our administration. More than 1,589 Marylanders have raised their hand to join a board or commission. Untold numbers are getting involved in their local governments, their civic organizations, and creating new ones we will soon know. People are signing up to serve, and I want them to keep signing up.

We can be a state that rewards, celebrates, and elevates a culture of service. We must be.

Let us serve, together, the people who entrusted us with a solemn oath to put them before ourselves.

It's an honor to stand before you, and it's an honor to serve beside you.

God bless Maryland. Let's get to work.

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