

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, today I have vetoed Senate Bill 257 – *Maryland Commission for Women*.

Senate Bill 257 changes the composition and appointment process of the Maryland Commission for Women, an executive entity that has been advising the office of the Governor and the legislature since 1965. The provisions of this bill allow the Governor to appoint only nine commissioners with the advice and consent of the Senate, and allow the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House to appoint eight commissioners each without the advice and consent of the Senate. Some of the members are nominated by organizations in the State with interest in women's issues, and the remaining members may apply on their own behalf. Additionally, the bill requires the Commission to inform the executive and legislative branches of government on issues concerning women, including testimony on issues before legislative and administrative bodies.

Under current law, the Governor appoints the 24 members of the Commission from a wide array of individuals interested in the improvement of the status of women in Maryland. The Governor also designates the chairman and vice-chairman of the Commission. The commissioners are all non-partisan and represent a diverse group of business owners, teachers, and law enforcement personnel who are experienced in public affairs, private industry, or volunteerism. The commissioners represent various age groups, ethnicities, and geographical regions of the State.

Since its inception, the Maryland Commission for Women has been a part of the Executive Branch. The Executive Director of the Maryland Commission for Women reports to the Secretary of the Department of Human Resources who, in turn, reports to me. As the Governor, one of my responsibilities is to respond to the concerns of the citizens of Maryland. I entrust certain entities, such as the Maryland Commission for Women, to advise me of citizen concerns, and I set policy in consideration of the advice.

It is abundantly clear that Senate Bill 257 is a reaction to the Commission's decision last fall to merge the function of the Legislative Agenda for Maryland Women into its internal Legislative and Public Policy Committee, which is responsible for building a legislative agenda for the Commission in collaboration with the Governor's office. The Legislative Agenda for Maryland Women was never a component of the Maryland Commission for Women. It has always been an outside, separately funded organization and over the past few years, the Maryland Commission for Women generously has donated its resources and time to this outside umbrella organization of advocacy groups. The decision to merge the Legislative Agenda for Maryland Women into the Commission was made to better utilize the Commission resources and to bring the proper function into an existing committee in the Commission.

While the overall purpose of the Commission remains unchanged in Senate Bill 257, again I am extremely concerned with the General Assembly's affinity for legislation that reorganizes entities within the Executive branch of government. The growing number of bills this General Assembly has passed that seek to curtail the powers of the executive branch of government is unprecedented and unwarranted.

For the above stated reasons, I have vetoed Senate Bill 257.