

Speaker Taylor Implores Lawmakers to Spread Maryland's Wealth

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House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., D-Allegany, urged lawmakers yesterday to keep his "One Maryland" legislation specifically targeted toward Maryland's poorest regions — even as more jurisdictions requested eligibility.

Taylor's request came during a House Economic Matters Committee hearing for HB 5, which proposes creating a \$40 million revolving loan fund to spur job creation in Maryland's six economically "distressed" jurisdictions: Allegany, Garrett, Somerset, Worcester and Dorchester counties and Baltimore City.

Taylor noted a recent report showed those regions chronically have among the state's worst unemployment, family income and public health figures.

"This isn't a one-year chart, this is a way of life" for those areas, Taylor said. "These are the common denominators that we don't want."

But even as Taylor asked committee members to create the fund, he warned that other jurisdictions are hoping to share in the benefits.

That includes the 30 municipalities located within the six defined distressed areas. James Peck, research director for the Maryland Municipal League, said making those municipalities direct beneficiaries would give them greater access to the fund.

"Municipalities seek to control their own destinies and not rely on other government bodies," Peck said.

Other counties have inquired about eligibility, but Taylor asked legislators to resist.

"All six of us meet all of the thresholds that define us as distressed jurisdictions," Taylor said. "You either meet the thresholds or you don't. God forbid, I hope no other jurisdiction [falls far enough to] get on this list."

Maryland business Secretary Richard C. Mike Lewin agreed with

Taylor when Del. Joseph J. Minnick, D-Balto. County, inquired whether he would support the fund's extension to Rosedale/Essex area.

"I would be opposed to that for one reason," Lewin replied. "Baltimore County is a rich county. They don't have the full faith and credit [match] problems Allegany County would."

Taylor spent about 20 minutes making the case for the legislation yesterday, walking the committee through the thresholds established in the report and pausing several times to let the sometimes dramatic results set in. "It is a devastating story," he said.

But Taylor, who was flanked by legislators from each of the six distressed jurisdictions, also cited progress in those areas and called the bill necessary to continue that momentum.

"If you can give us the tools we need to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get jobs and get an education, you won't have to give us one-third of our income [in government subsidies] every year," he said.

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Howard P. Rawlings, D-Balto. City, guaranteed that his committee would find money for the new fund in Gov. Parris N. Glendening's fiscal 2000 budget proposal.