

Booster Shot!

Looming 'One Maryland' Deal Could Aid Laggards

6.9.99

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In just three weeks, the highly anticipated "One Maryland" economic development program designed to bolster the state's most distressed counties takes effect. And according to the most recent unemployment data, it comes not a minute too soon.

While Maryland as a whole is enjoying the second lowest unemployment rate in state history, Baltimore City and six counties on the Eastern Shore and in Western Maryland continue to languish.

The overall rate fell to 3.4 percent in April, from 3.7 percent one month earlier, the state's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation reported.

Meanwhile, rates in seven subdivisions remain at one-and-a-half times or more of the state average: Baltimore City (6.9 percent), Allegany (8.1 percent), Dorchester (8.1 percent), Garrett (8.3 percent), Somerset (8.1 percent), Wicomico (5.1 percent), and Worcester (9.4 percent).

Companies moving to or expanding in counties where unemployment is 150 percent or more of the state average are eligible for tax credits under "One Maryland," an initiative passed unanimously in the most recent General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Parris N. Glendening.

The architect and chief proponent of "One Maryland," House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., expects positive results almost immediately for the chronically depressed regions. "I think that, with any luck at all, you're going to see companies locate in these distressed counties because of the tax credits by the end of this calendar year," said Taylor, a Western Maryland Democrat.

"One Maryland" actually has two prongs: a loan fund and tax credits. The fund will be used to finance economic development projects, including in-

frastructural undertakings, in struggling counties.

The credits will go to companies that open up or expand business facilities in the troubled subdivisions and create 25 new full-time jobs. Qualified businesses can offset start-up costs by keeping state income tax withholdings from employees' salaries and claiming a credit against the state income tax.

"One Maryland" gets its name from the emergence of two different economic Marylands in recent years, according to supporters. There's Central Maryland and the Washington suburbs, and then there's Baltimore City, Western Maryland, and the Eastern Shore.

For example, while unemployment is more than 8 percent in Garrett to the west and Dorchester to the east, the rate is less than 2 percent in Howard and Montgomery counties.

Leading up to the July 1 effective date for "One Maryland," the state's Department of Business and Economic Development and the distressed counties are marketing the program to potential participants.

Taylor, the highest-ranking official in the House of Delegates, said there is considerable corporate interest in "One Maryland," both in his area and elsewhere.

We're "spreading the word to a whole lot of companies that are coming to show interest in this," Taylor said.