

Support for HB 17  
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There are three main reasons I ask you to vote for HB17.

First, it puts important legislative oversight on the emergency powers of the Governor. It creates an opportunity for important public deliberation on acts that potentially severely restrict Maryland residents. Any deliberation that may have been done regarding the present state of emergency was out of sight of the public and no one was given the opportunity to weigh in.

HB17, if passed, will result in better decisions governing emergencies because there will be more oversight and input with those decisions.

Governor Hogan has the Governor's Emergency Management Advisory Council (GEMAC), but reading GEMAC's minutes from the meetings in 2020, this council did not advise the Governor on the creation of a state of emergency, its duration, its prohibitions or its mandates. Their discussions surrounding Covid dealt with sharing information on actions taken by various "stakeholders", budgetary impacts and legislation needed. This committee's statutory purpose is to "advise the Governor on all matters that relate to emergency management." In other words, the GEMAC's purpose is to help coordinate the various parts of government dealing with the emergency. "GEMAC is provided with the opportunity to share information amongst its members on any matter related to COVID19 response/recovery operations." Advising the Governor on when an emergency was declared, how long it would exist, or what mandates or prohibitions should or would be imposed on the public is a legislative role and should be reclaimed by the General Assembly by passing HB17. This is the second reason I ask you to support HB17.

The third reason is to help secure our rights as guaranteed by the US and Maryland Constitutions. These documents are the foundation upon which all Maryland laws rest and they detail and secure the basic rights that we have as a free people. We have the right to assemble, to worship, to speak freely, to pursue our own happiness as we see fit, which includes working, attending school, shopping, etcetera. HB 17 reinforces and reminds the Governor that the people of Maryland have these rights and they must be protected.

We have not given the Governor the power to take away our rights for *any reason*, and in fact, the Maryland Constitution specifically states, "That the provisions of the Constitution of the United States, and of this State, apply, as well in time of war, as in time of peace; and **any departure therefrom, or violation thereof, under the plea of necessity, or any other plea, is subversive of good Government, and tends to anarchy and despotism.**"

A free people are not told they do not have the freedom to move about as they wish; that they must not go to their jobs, schools or churches; that they must not open their businesses; what they must wear and where they must stand. A free people are not told to give up their rights and then punished if they

do not. That type of abusive authority has not been seen in this country since we were subjects of an English king, indentured servants and slaves, and we cannot allow it to return.

The Maryland Governor was not able to keep Marylanders from getting Covid despite his most restrictive efforts, but under the “state of emergency” that has existed in Maryland for nearly a year the people of Maryland have suffered even more severely. Because of the seemingly endless shut downs, huge numbers of people have lost their jobs and many may lose their homes. Their children have lost a year of education. Families are being torn apart from financial and mental stress. People are depressed. Drug and alcohol abuse is skyrocketing. Overdoses, suicides and physical abuse are way up. If the General Assembly had deliberated the extensions to the state of emergency there could have been more consideration given to the costs of extending the severe restrictions. More thought could have been given to Covid mitigation responses with less devastating results. The people of Maryland might have ended the year in better shape instead of tragically worse shape.

We should have been told what the known and suspected risks of Covid were, given recommended actions to take, and left to determine our own willingness to assume or avoid those risks. The government should not be attempting to control the population, but assisting the population in knowing what the best possible courses of action are and encouraging those actions, but giving people the freedom to make their own choices and live their own lives.

The residents of Maryland have a right to make their own decisions, whether it is regarding their health, their job, their business, their social and religious activity or schooling for their kids.

By passing HB17 it takes the decision to extend the emergency out of the hands of one person. It opens up the discussion on what the best course of action in an emergency is, returns the legislative function to the legislature where it belongs, and protects the rights of a free people.

Thank you.