

RECESSION DEVASTATES MARYLAND'S BUDGET

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Just in time for the holidays, a new estimate of the U.S. recession's impact on Maryland's revenues has created a budget nightmare! Funding has been tight for years and the Governor cut the budget in October. But now, even after state employee furloughs, hundreds of millions more must be cut in the current year, and next year's budget shortfall has grown to almost \$2 billion. With the economy and stock market failing, foundations and corporate supporters have less to give while more and more people are asking you for help.

What can you do?

1. **Start NOW!**
2. **Call Your Members of Congress!** The best chance to avoid total budget meltdown for programs and services critical to the people and communities nonprofits serve is help from Washington. (Find their contact information at <http://capwiz.com/mdnonprofit/state/delegation/?state=MD>)

There is great momentum building for a new federal economic stimulus package that includes substantial funds for state governments. Key points to include in your message are:

- **How Much** – We need close to \$2 billion in help for the state **operating budget** to avoid damaging additional spending cuts. There is already strong pressure to fund infrastructure projects that are “spade ready” such as roads and bridges. **These are important, but don't prevent state spending cuts for operating programs that immediately harm people, communities and the economy** - employee lay-offs and pay cuts, health and education reductions, cut-offs or cutbacks of benefits and services to families and individuals.
- **An Example** - If you can, tell them specifically how your cause or your clients are at risk.
- **How Fast** - We need commitment of funds in the next few months to help with the state budget for Fiscal Year 2010 that starts this coming July 1.

Contact your Representative and Senators as soon as possible! Press these needs on them on behalf of their constituents. Go to our Legislative Action Center (www.capwiz.com/mdnonprofit) to learn more, or even send a prepared message via email from our website. (**But personal contacts such as phone calls or letters are more effective**)

3. **Fight any more cuts in this or next year's budget.** Organize your arguments and write your best 'elevator' speech -- why should your area be spared additional cutbacks. Stress "real world" consequences, such as how many people will be turned away or given less than adequate help, personal stories of affected people, and clear 'plain English' descriptions of your services and how they help people.

Use any available contacts to press your case, particularly with the governor, his staff and state cabinet secretaries. (What contacts do your board members or other supporters have?) Remember that the Governor must propose current year reductions and controls allocations in next year's budget. He is the key "decider" and is now finalizing his budget for FY 2010.

Who are your supporters or potential advocates in the legislature? They may be able to negotiate some budget priorities. Some of the funding cuts or shifts will require approval in separate legislation. Find who in Annapolis will help you and give them information and arguments.

Keep up with revenue and budget developments using the **Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute** – www.marylandpolicy.org.

4. **Fight for public opinion.** All other things being equal, officials are least likely to cut what the public appears to care about most. For both these near-term battles, and the long-term future, you must try to build public understanding and support for your cause.

Do you ever get mentioned in the media – in community, regional or major outlets? Find ways to get your stories and your information out to the public. Legislators care about what they think their constituents care about – and they pay attention to local news and events. Do they receive your newsletter? Have they ever heard or seen a mention of your program or cause in the community?

6. **You are not alone.** Others share your interests and priorities. Think county-wide and then think statewide. Network and work with your peers and other advocates. The Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute (www.marylandpolicy.org) will continue providing updated information on the revenue and budget situation.

This is advocacy, even 'lobbying'. But that's OK! Maryland Nonprofits can explain the rules and best practices for nonprofits doing public education, lobbying, and other forms of advocacy. We can answer your questions about the state budget and legislative processes. Make sure you are on our contact list.

Public investment in Maryland's communities, programs and services is failing and must be protected and improved. Please share your stories and information with us. Contact us with any questions.

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