

STATE of the CIRCLE

Official Newsletter of the MGRA December, 2020



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Whether you are brand new to the world of government relations or you're a seasoned lobbyist, we all will be in the same boat, learning and navigating a never-before-seen (and hopefully never-to-be-seen again) process for the 2021 Maryland General Assembly Session. With hearings being virtual, limits on testimony, and little to no physical access to the State Complex, the pandemic will test everyone's ability to be resourceful, flexible and patient.

When the 2020 Maryland General Assembly Session ended early in mid-March last year, most of us were not thinking



that the COVID-19 pandemic would still be with us and have had such a dramatic impact on all areas of our lives, including this Session. We find ourselves now figuring out how we, as professionals in the government relations field, interact with law makers in a very different manner than we are used to. We are advising our clients (cont'd p2)



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Member Spotlight

Congratulations to MGRA Board members who have been recognized for their professional accomplishments. Emily Arneseon, Director of Government Relations at Kennedy Krieger Institute, was named one of [The Daily Record's Leading Women](#) in 2020. Eric Johnston, Director of Government Relations at Coca-Cola Consolidated, was named one of [The Daily Record's VIP List](#). Both of these awards recognize leaders who are 40 years old or younger.



Eric Johnston



Emily Arneseon

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OPENING GUIDELINES & TUTORIALS

Staff for the General Assembly have been working non-stop since the early closing of Session last year to design new processes and procedures for the unique 2021 Session. [Written guidelines](#) are available on the General Assembly's website for both Senate and House operations. In addition, brand new [video tutorials](#) have posted on the website. As the process for signing up witnesses and submitting testimony requires creating an account in the MyMGA system, it is important to look at them before bill hearings commence. The Board of Directors of MGRA has been engaged in discussions with Legislative leadership about the procedures for the 2021 Session. Leadership and their staff have demon-

strated a willingness to listen to our concerns and incorporate some of our suggestions. MGRA is committed to providing constructive feedback to General Assembly staff as we work within these new systems and limitations. Let us know where things are working well, and where you have ideas for improvement.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

and employers how to prepare for virtual bill hearings; how to engage members without a reception or in-person advocacy activity; and how to decide what issues should move forward in 2021 given the priority needs related to public health, racial justice, and budget deficits.

One thing I am reminded of in my interactions with law makers and their staff is that they too are struggling with issues in their personal lives as well as how they will conduct business beginning January 13th. They are truly concerned about how they will be able to make the best informed decisions given the limited interaction with constituents and lobbyists alike. Legislators are deciding whether to stay in Annapolis or work remotely as much as possible. They are working with their staff to decide who should be in the office and when. One legislator I spoke with said he is planning on having two computers running, one for committee work and one for meetings, all while monitoring his phone for texts.

As we say good riddance to an absolutely horrific year, and start one that comes with the deployment of vaccinations and a light at the end of the tunnel, let us remember we are all in this same boat, trying to work our way through these new waters. Let us treat one another with kindness and be patient as we figure out how to make sound policy decisions in this unique time.

Ann Ciekot
MGRA President

FALL EVENT

MGRA hosted a forum in October featuring the Chiefs of Staff from the offices of Governor Hogan, Senate President Ferguson, and House Speaker Jones. Keiffer Mitchell (now the Gov's Chief Legislative Officer), Jake Weissmann, and Alexandra Hughes were asked questions about general priorities for the 2021 Session and how the process and procedures for conducting the business of the General Assembly will take place. Mitchell pointed out that the Governor had been using federal Corona virus aide to demonstrate his policy priorities. Regarding the challenges with a virtual Session, Weissmann said they were working diligently to find balance between safety, transparency and access. And Hughes wrapped up the event by asking that everyone treat each other with kindness as we all work through this together.



*Keiffer Mitchell, Jr.,
Chief Legislative Officer
Governor Hogan*



*Jake Weissman (l),
Chief of Staff
Senate President Ferguson*



*Alexandra Hughes (r)
Chief of Staff
House Speaker Jones*



2020 Reality

*Oh how we look forward to meeting
in person!*

Welcome! Want to be involved with this publication? Submit your creative ideas to MDGov-Relations@gmail.com .

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MEMBERSHIP

Member Benefits include:

- Free networking opportunities throughout the year, including happy hours, brown bag lunch discussions, and membership meetings (all respecting public health guidance);
- Excellent online programming to respect public health guidance
- Events featuring members of the Maryland General Assembly and Executive Branch;
- Reduced admission to events such as our Post Session Wrap Up, Summer Networking Luncheon, NCSL Annual State Night Dinner, Fall Forum, and Annual MGRA Achievement Awards; and
- Member-only activities including our Election Project - a detailed analysis of political races throughout Maryland offering insider-only knowledge .

Join or Renew today!

www.mgra.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS: 2021

January 13 – Opening Day of Session

January 19 – House and Senate bill request deadline

January 20 – Governor’s Budget Introduced

February 5 – House bill intro deadline

February 8 – Senate bill intro deadline

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