



BARRY GLASSMAN

HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Harford Executive Announces 32% Decline in Opioid Fatalities, Unprecedented Partnerships for Public Safety & Coastal Resilience in Annual State of the County Address

BEL AIR, Md., (Jan. 14, 2020) - County Executive Barry Glassman called for national unity in his annual State of the County address on Tuesday and credited local partnerships for contributing to Harford's progress. In a speech entitled "Moving Forward Together" he reported on the county's improved financial position and a major reduction in opioid fatalities while announcing unprecedented collaborations planned to enhance public safety and the environment.

Reviewing the county's fiscal condition, County Executive Glassman said that Harford was one of the few suburban counties to regain its standing following the great recession without levying new taxes or raising tax rates. Harford also remains among the 2% of counties nationwide to maintain a AAA bond rating. At the same time his administration has restored pay increases in each of the past five years for county employees, deputies, correctional officers and teachers, he said. Education funding remains a top priority, as Harford County's \$10.7 million increase for public education this year was the fourth highest in the state.

As the county's revenues continue to grow, the county executive said he would be setting aside a portion of the fund balance for potential state mandates arising from the Kirwan Commission's recommendations. The state commission has called for an additional \$4 billion in education funding annually, following a ten-year phase-in period. The final cost to Harford County is unknown, however, as the legislature is expected to finalize Kirwan funding and other mandates during the 2020 Maryland General Assembly session that ends in April.

"Either way, I plan to be in a position to continue making record increases in funding for our education system," County Executive Glassman said.

Reporting the latest state figures on opioid overdoses, County Executive Glassman said that fatalities in Harford had declined 32% in the first nine months of 2019 versus the same period in 2018. The drop was the largest of the “Big 7” Maryland jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the county executive remained vigilant.

“We will not rest, but continue to shine a light on recovery and expand our efforts to help survivors heal and rebuild their lives,” he said.

The county executive also cited partnerships with local agencies on efforts such as The Klein Family Harford Crisis Center, which has served more than 1,200 individuals since the walk-in center opened in June, and handled more than 5,000 hotline calls since its launch in October 2018. Leading by example on insurance coverage for behavioral health and addiction treatment, the county executive announced that county employees who visit the center will be covered.

Living Shoreline

To minimize coastal erosion and stabilize a portion of the shoreline along the Susquehanna River, County Executive Glassman announced a first-of-its-kind partnership among his administration, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the city of Havre de Grace on a living shoreline project. Living shorelines use plantings, rocks, and other natural materials to create a coastal edge that grows over time and provides wildlife habitats and natural resilience for waterfront communities. The county will contribute up to \$500,000 toward the project design to secure state grants for construction.

Public Safety

As volunteer fire companies struggle to attract personnel statewide, County Executive Glassman announced Maryland’s first student loan repayment assistance program for college graduates who serve as volunteer fire or EMS responders in Harford County. Harford’s NEXT GEN Responder program, modeled after a proposal working its way through the Pennsylvania legislature, would repay student loan amounts up to \$5,000 per year for up to four years, or a total of \$20,000, for qualified college graduates in any field. The county executive also said that the county’s existing tuition reimbursement program for EMS training will be extended to include firefighter courses.

To further supplement the local fire service, County Executive Glassman also announced the county’s first public/private partnership on a new substation in Riverside. The substation, to be financed and built by county government, will be operated by the Abingdon Volunteer Fire Company. It will house both Harford County and Abingdon VFC personnel and medic units.

In closing, the county executive thanked Harford County Public Library and the nearly 50 other local agencies, nonprofits, businesses and individuals who have joined together for Choose Civility Harford County, a movement to promote empathy, tolerance and respect for all.

“Instead of dividing people by their politics, race and religion, Harford County is choosing to build bridges,” he said. Quoting Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s call to always keep moving, County Executive Glassman added, “Indeed, Harford County will move forward together in this new decade.”

The Glassman administration’s progress report for 2019 is published online at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/2135/Annual-Progress-Reports>.

Video of the State of the County Address will be archived online at <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/411/Video-Gallery>.

Text of the speech is online at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/1826/State-of-the-County-Addresses>.

More information about Choose Civility is on the website <https://www.hcplonline.org/choosecivility/>.

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