



Work, Wages, and Wealth:

Building a Growing and Thriving Economy that Lifts up Every Maryland Family

Maryland's highly-educated workforce, access to markets and capital, our major international airport, world-class colleges and universities, military installations, and government agencies make our state better positioned than any place in the world to compete in the new economy. Maryland's economy works because of the determination and ingenuity of our citizens. Our diversity, geographic beauty, and unmatched quality of life, make our state a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed what many Marylanders have known for too long; a lack of strategic vision continues to hold us back in key areas and far too many Marylanders are being left behind as a result. This is why Maryland's unemployment rate sits at 5.7%, while the national unemployment rate has fallen to 4.2%. As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and see billions of dollars of federal relief flowing into our state, including for transportation that will connect people with new resources, we have the opportunity to implement policies that will establish Maryland as a national and global competitor and ensure that when Maryland competes, we win.

To take Maryland to the next level, we must build a stronger economic infrastructure that leverages our strengths and assets to create new opportunities for all Marylanders, especially those who have historically been left behind. That means taking immediate action to: close the labor skills gaps by transforming our workforce development system; attract and retain leading industries and talent; create new opportunities to enter high-demand jobs; and support workers with the programs and infrastructure they need, including child care, so they can thrive in the job market. Together, these efforts will lead to better employment opportunities, higher wages, and allow families across the state to build the generational wealth needed for economic stability.

Maryland needs a governor who understands how to build and grow an economy that lifts everyone up. Wes is that leader. As the CEO of one of the largest anti-poverty nonprofits in the country, Wes raised and leveraged \$650 million in funding to fight poverty and his work created generational change for families served. Under his leadership, the nonprofit invested over \$11 million per year in job training programs and dedicated \$750,000 to adult education programs. In 2020 alone, the organization served more than 1 million people, provided financial assistance to 125,000 households experiencing unemployment, helped young adults gain the skills needed to

secure good paying jobs and increased college graduation rates by 20%.¹ In addition, he founded a small business in Maryland that helped remove structural barriers to college access and completion for underserved students. During his tenure there, college retention rates increased by 20% on average.²

Wes has the experience and the knowledge needed to build a thriving economic infrastructure that provides everyone with the opportunity to succeed. Wes recognizes that we cannot create opportunities and growth without strengthening the underlying foundation of our economy and that is why he will take a comprehensive approach, leveraging our state's core strengths to drive economic opportunity, identify new areas where we can better compete, and build an economic infrastructure that lifts up all Marylanders.

Attract and Retain Leading Industries and Talent to Maryland

Maryland's highly-educated workforce, access to markets and capital, and world-class universities and government agencies make our state a prime location for business. The Port of Baltimore and BWI airport are second to none in the world, and our location puts us within a day's reach of 1/3 of U.S. households.³ As a state, we are well-positioned to attract and retain companies and talent from around the world. There are remarkable opportunities to attract new businesses and industries while retaining and growing the companies that are already here but we have to expand our vision for our economy and stop overbidding on one-off projects. As governor, Wes will focus on growing new and existing industries and closely monitor emerging industries to ensure that Maryland is prepared to compete and respond to opportunities and challenges.

Prioritize Business and Talent Recruitment

Develop new benefits for Maryland businesses and better market the state. To compete with other states and build strong regional partnerships, we must not only make it easier for businesses and talent to locate and grow in Maryland, but we must also better market the benefits for businesses and workers considering locating or growing in Maryland. That is why as governor, Wes will work with state and local leaders to catalogue and map our assets, including business, transportation, educational, workforce, and environmental assets across Maryland so we can better promote the state and forge regional partnerships to attract businesses and talent. Wes will also create stronger partnerships between the federal government, Maryland's world-class institutions of higher education, the business community, and incubators so that businesses can leverage these relationships to grow and thrive.

Make talent recruitment a top priority. To attract top talent to Maryland, we will need new and exciting ways to present our strengths and assets. Moreover, we will need compelling ways to demonstrate our understanding of the evolving workforce and workplace. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, employers and employees have seen

¹ "An Unprecedented Year." Robin Hood Foundation, n.d.
<https://robinhoodorg-wp-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/08/RHAR2020.pdf>.

² Edquity. "Edquity Acquires Student Retention Expert Bridgeedu." Edquity Acquires Student Retention Expert Bridgeedu, June 11, 2019.
<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/edquity-acquires-student-retention-expert-bridgeedu-300864938.html>.

³ "Department of Transportation Port Administration." Maryland.gov Port Administration, n.d.
<https://mpa.maryland.gov/pages/location-information.aspx>.

the significant advantages in a remote workforce, which presents new opportunities for talent recruitment.⁴ We no longer need to rely on recruiting an entire business to locate in Maryland when we can instead focus on recruiting top talent and entrepreneurs to live and work in our state. As governor, Wes will capitalize on this competitive advantage and recruit top talent to Maryland by leveraging and promoting remote work. Wes will develop a media campaign touting the benefits of Maryland for remote workers, and establish redevelopment communities in urban and rural areas where remote workers can earn incentives for relocating there. Wes will also establish a new position in the Maryland Economic Development Commission solely focused on recruiting top talent in high-demand fields like BioTech, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing. Not only will this help us to attract the world-class talent our industries need, it will also increase our tax base without needing to bring every business to Maryland.

Implement a talent development program as part of economic development incentives. When businesses consider where to locate or expand, a highly-trained and qualified workforce is key. High-skill businesses will not invest in a state that does not have the ability to provide highly skilled workers. To connect workers to new job opportunities and create incentives for businesses to select Maryland, Wes will implement a highly-specialized program as part of the state’s economic development incentives that will work directly with businesses to identify and quickly train workers to fill their jobs. Wes will achieve this by partnering with Maryland’s community colleges and career training centers to develop short-term immersion programs that will move students quickly through training and into careers. He will also explore opportunities to co-locate training programs within a business headquarters. This program will make Maryland a more attractive place to do business and help Marylanders get the skills they need to fill good jobs.

Recruit businesses from states enacting far-right social agendas. As states around the nation continue to pass anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-voting laws, businesses are evaluating opportunities to relocate their headquarters or employees to other states with more friendly and welcoming climates. These businesses recognize that it is difficult to attract and retain high-quality talent if employees and their families will not have access to reproductive health care, will face discrimination, or could lose their right to vote. As governor, Wes will ensure that Maryland remains open and inclusive, while leveraging Maryland’s core strengths to recruit companies away from states that are not.

Focus on our regional strengths to grow local economies. Maryland’s nickname “America in Miniature” is fitting and should be reflected in our economic strategy. For too long we have neglected remarkable economic opportunities that come with our geographic and economic advantages. Wes’ economic strategy will focus on the entire state and strengths of each region. He will work with Frostburg State University to leverage the strengths and beauty of the Appalachian region to attract and retain jobs, and work with Salisbury University and the UMES to make our Eastern Shore a global leader in environmental and agricultural innovation. He will also work to reestablish Baltimore

⁴ Saad, Lydia, and Ben Wigert. “Remote Work Persisting and Trending Permanent.” Gallup, November 24, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/355907/remote-work-persisting-trending-permanent.aspx>.

City as one of the greatest cities in America, focusing on retaining existing residents and attracting families, businesses and talent to relocate there.

Drive Innovation and Grow STEM and Life Sciences Industries

Produce 150,000 Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) graduates by 2027. STEM industries and jobs have grown significantly over the past decade and that growth is only expected to continue.⁵ In addition to driving innovation across sectors, STEM jobs can also offer more than twice the median wages of non-STEM jobs.⁶ In order to meet the demands of Maryland's existing industries and attract new ones that will grow our economy and create new opportunities for Marylanders, we must accelerate our ability to produce STEM graduates. We must also improve diversity so that historically underrepresented women and students of color are able to access the same opportunities.⁷ As governor, Wes will expand Maryland's successful P-Tech program to additional public schools, which leverages partnerships between school districts, the business community and our institutions of higher education so that students can obtain a cost-free associates degree in key STEM fields. Wes will also set clear benchmarks for institutions of higher education and community colleges to produce 40,000 new STEM graduates each year and utilize incentives like tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to drive students into STEM programs and reward institutions for achieving their benchmarks. Additionally, Wes will develop public-private partnerships with industry leaders to fund STEM apprenticeships to ensure students can earn while they learn.

Make Maryland the Capital of Quantum. Advancements in quantum computing have the ability to completely transform technology, drive innovation across industries and solve some of our nation's most complex challenges.⁸ That is why other global competitors like China are making major investments in hopes of becoming the first to fully develop and leverage this technology.⁹ Maryland is already leading the nation and will be home to the National Quantum Computing Lab at the University of Maryland (Q-Lab), the first of its kind in the nation.¹⁰ Continuing to grow this industry will set Maryland up not only to be a national leader, but a global leader and competitor. As governor, Wes will ensure that Maryland's public schools increase exposure, offer relevant coursework and enable students to build competencies that will facilitate a smooth transition into relevant degree programs within our institutions of higher education. Wes will also continue to invest in quantum computing so that our institutions of higher education are able to offer the necessary degree programs, expand their wet lab

⁵ Horan, CEPF, Stephanie. "Fastest-Growing STEM Jobs in the U.S. – 2020 Edition." SmartAsset, February 16, 2021. <https://smartasset.com/checking-account/fastest-growing-stem-jobs-in-the-us-2020>.

⁶ "Employment in STEM Occupations." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 8, 2021. <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/stem-employment.htm>.

⁷ Fry, Richard, Brian Kennedy, and Cary Funk. "Stem Jobs See Uneven Progress in Increasing Gender, Racial and Ethnic Diversity." Pew Research Center Science & Society. Pew Research Center, April 1, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/04/01/stem-jobs-see-uneven-progress-in-increasing-gender-racial-and-ethnic-diversity/>.

⁸ Pistilli, Tony, and Chris Rohde. "Quantum Computing—The Next Technological Transformation." The Actuary, February 2021. <https://theactuarymagazine.org/quantum-computing-the-next-technological-transformation/>.

⁹ Garisto, Daniel. "China Is Pulling Ahead in Global Quantum Race, New Studies Suggest." Scientific American. Scientific American, July 15, 2021. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/china-is-pulling-ahead-in-global-quantum-race-new-studies-suggest/>.

¹⁰ Combs, Veronica. "IonQ and University of Maryland Plan Q-Lab for Hands-on Quantum Computing Research." TechRepublic. TechRepublic, September 8, 2021. <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/ionq-and-university-of-maryland-plan-q-lab-for-hands-on-quantum-computing-research/>.

space, and focus on commercializing their research. Finally, Wes will focus on building this new sector with equity in mind, promoting diversity in the workforce, diverse business ownerships and the ability for businesses of all sizes and backgrounds to compete.

Accelerate Maryland’s ability to translate research into new business opportunities. Maryland is home to some of the nation’s most premiere life science research institutions and federal agencies, including Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland, the National Institutes of Health, and the Food and Drug Administration. Maryland is also going to be home to the first full-scale quantum computing lab in the nation, which is expected to lead to major advancements in pharmaceutical research and other medical fields, well-positioning our state to win business and commercialize research. Still, other states continue to outperform us in attracting these new companies and jobs.¹¹ As governor, Wes will strengthen partnerships between these institutions and the federal government to streamline and grow research opportunities. He will also make sure that institutions of higher education are equipping students and researchers with the skills they need to commercialize their work, and he will develop strong relationships with potential funders, incubators, businesses and entrepreneurial organizations to support commercialization. Finally, Wes will break down barriers for startups and businesses by eliminating costly and overly burdensome regulatory requirements that cause people to start or grow their businesses in other states.

Help Morgan State University (MSU) become the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) with R1 research status. In 2018, MSU was designated as an R2 research institution, one of only 11 HBCUs in the nation to achieve this prestigious designation.¹² This status enables the university to access additional grants and funding streams and increases the likelihood of winning larger and more complex research projects. As governor, Wes will direct additional resources to MSU and ensure that MSU becomes the first HBCU in the nation to achieve R1 status. This will not only create new opportunities for Black students to obtain undergraduate and doctoral degrees in these critical fields, but it will also make Maryland more competitive for business, job and talent recruitment and produce tremendous economic impacts for Maryland and Baltimore City. A study by MSU found that the university generates over \$1 billion in economic impact to the state each year, and over \$600 million for Baltimore City alone.¹³ The university estimates that this impact would be doubled with an R1 status like that of Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland.¹⁴ With three R1 institutions in Maryland, the state would be well-positioned to attract industry leaders in a number of fields, including BioTech. As governor, Wes will make this a key priority of his administration.

¹¹ Khatib, Jade. “See the States That Have the Most Biotech Firms and the Financial Incentives They Offer.” Business Insider. Business Insider, August 26, 2021. <https://www.businessinsider.com/california-massachusetts-new-york-map-top-states-biotech-incentives-2021-8>.

¹² Donastorg, Mirtha. “No HBCU Is Part of the Upper Echelon of Research Universities. Morgan State Aims to Change That.: Latest News.” The Plug, November 2, 2021.

<https://www.tpinsights.com/free-articles/no-hbcu-is-part-of-the-upper-echelon-of-research-universities-morgan-state-aims-to-change-that>.

¹³ “Economic Impact Report.” Morgan State University - Maryland's Preeminent Urban Public Research University, n.d.

<https://www.morgan.edu/economicimpact>.

¹⁴ “Research.” Morgan State University - Maryland's Preeminent Urban Public Research University, n.d. <https://www.morgan.edu/research>.

Support and Grow Small Businesses

Maryland is home to more than 600,000 small businesses, making up more than half our state's employees.¹⁵ Small businesses are present in every corner of Maryland and often act as economic levelers – providing wealth and employment to people who have traditionally faced economic disadvantage. These small businesses have also been impacted the most by the pandemic and we must do better as a state to support them. That starts with breaking down barriers that make Maryland a less attractive state for small businesses and increasing access to resources and capital so that every small business owner will want to start, grow and stay in Maryland.

Create new resources and access to assistance for micro businesses. Small businesses have historically struggled with access to capital and a recent survey found that nearly half of small businesses around the nation lack cash reserves to sustain them longer than three months.¹⁶ For Black-owned businesses, the situation is even more dire, with over half reporting a lack of cash reserves to sustain them for the same period of time.¹⁷ As the wealthiest state in the nation, Maryland can and should be doing more to support small businesses. That is why Wes will partner with the banking and business communities, as well as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to develop new financing programs to help small and micro businesses get access to low or no-interest capital to sustain their operations and support their growth. The U.S. Department of the Treasury has already allocated \$12 billion to support CDFIs and minority depository institutions to support these goals and Maryland must be ready to leverage these investments.¹⁸ Additionally, Wes recognizes that Small Business Investment Companies can play an essential role in supporting small businesses in underserved areas and will work to grow their presence in Maryland. Wes will also create new marketing resources that these businesses can leverage so they can focus their time and capital on developing their core business.

Ensure that small and micro businesses can compete and establish “Buy Local” benchmarks. Winning a contract to do business with the state can change the trajectory of a company, but the bidding and selection process can be confusing and often favors larger, more established operations. This is especially true for minority-owned businesses, despite the fact that Maryland has set clear procurement standards for state agencies to achieve through the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Program. In fact, only a small number of state agencies are meeting the 29% standard, with the statewide average being roughly 14%.¹⁹ Awards to MBEs also decreased by more than 30% from 2019-2020.²⁰ As governor, Wes will reform Maryland's procurement process and make it easier for small and minority businesses to win the state's business. He will require clear small business set-asides and amplify the impact by making it easier for local

¹⁵ “Small Business Administration,” 2020.

<https://cdn.advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/04143054/2020-Small-Business-Economic-Profile-MD.pdf>.

¹⁶ Newsroom. “Small Businesses Struggling amid Pandemic-Related Headwinds.” The Weekly Journal, September 7, 2021.

https://www.theweeklyjournal.com/business/small-businesses-struggling-amid-pandemic-related-headwinds/article_2512f310-1012-11ec-94e5-d72b9e0209db.html.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Treasury to Invest \$9 Billion in Community Development Financial Institutions and Minority Depository Institutions Through Emergency Capital Investment Program (ECIP).” March 4, 2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0047>

¹⁹ “Governor's Office of Small, Minority and Women Business Affairs,” n.d. https://gomdsmallbiz.maryland.gov/Reports/FY2020_Annual%20Report.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.

governments to piggyback on state contracts with small businesses. Wes will eliminate costly and overly burdensome regulations, provide technical assistance, and connect small business owners with financial resources. Finally, Wes will set new benchmarks requiring state agencies to procure at least 10% of their goods and services from Maryland businesses, which will further support small and local operations.

Building a Stronger Economic Infrastructure

Maryland's economy works because of our incredible assets and resources, but our inability to build and sustain a strong economic infrastructure has prevented us from fully recognizing our potential. It is clear that taking Maryland to the next level is going to require major policy changes and investments in our economic infrastructure. Wes recognizes that building a stronger economic infrastructure means investing in our children, students and families that make up our current workforce and the workforce of our future.

Invest in Early Childhood Education

Deliver preschool for all children in need. Investing in high-quality early childhood education has been proven to enhance reading and math proficiency, which in turn lowers drop-out rates, improves graduation rates and increases future earnings.²¹ It should come as no surprise that in addition to improving outcomes for children and families, these early investments also produce tremendous economic returns. Every \$1 invested in quality programs can result in up to \$13 in benefits to our economy.²² Maryland has taken important steps to lower the cost of preschool for Maryland families as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's future, but our children cannot wait 10 years for the plan's full implementation. Additionally, many families above 300% of the federal poverty level still struggle to afford the cost of high-quality early childhood education. As governor, Wes will accelerate Maryland's path to preschool for all children, as well as the creation of all new required Judy and Family Support Centers. Wes will also explore opportunities to expand the criteria for free preschool so that additional families and children can benefit. These investments will better ensure our youngest Marylanders are positioned to succeed in life and in the workplace.

Strengthen Maryland's early childhood education and child care programs. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vital role of Maryland's child care infrastructure such as our early childhood education centers and child care providers for families across our state and our economy. Without a strong child care network, families and businesses have suffered as caregivers, particularly women, have been forced to leave the labor force to provide for their families.²³ As governor, Wes will focus heavily on strengthening Maryland's early childhood education and child care systems and building capacity among private care providers as part of that solution. Wes will leverage the framework adopted in the 2021 legislation creating the Growing Family Child Care

²¹ Lynch, Robert, and Kayva Vaghul. "The Benefits and Costs of Investing in Early Childhood Education." *Equitable Growth*. Washington Center for Equitable Growth, December 2, 2015.

<https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/the-benefits-and-costs-of-investing-in-early-childhood-education/?longform=true>.

²² Workman, Simon. "Where Does Your Child Care Dollar Go?" *Center for American Progress*, February 14, 2018.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-dollar-go/>.

²³ Schochet, Leila. "The Child Care Crisis Is Keeping Women out of the Workforce." *Center for American Progress*, April 10, 2019.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-crisis-keeping-women-workforce/>.

Opportunities Pilot Program and explore opportunities to grow the program in future years. He will also work with stakeholders to develop a system for privately operated early childhood education centers and child care providers to assess safety, quality of curriculum, affordability, and accessibility, and provide additional subsidies to those who serve families in need. These efforts will expand access to care and improve outcomes for children and families.

Transform Maryland's Workforce Development System

Create new pathways to the workforce by expanding access to short-term credentialing programs. Like many other states, Maryland is experiencing a skills gap crisis in our workforce and our families, businesses and economy are paying the price. While it is true that most jobs require some level of training after high school, less than 40% actually require a four-year degree, and 47% of jobs could be filled with the right job training.²⁴ That includes in-demand and high-paying STEM jobs that are critical to building a stronger economy.²⁵ Unfortunately, only 37% of Marylanders have the right skills to fill those jobs.²⁶ As governor, Wes will stand up a new credentialing program in partnership with Maryland's top-notch community college system by leveraging federal workforce development funds. This program will cover the majority of the job training program cost and enable students of all ages to obtain a skill and step into a high-demand job in a matter of weeks. Wes will also explore additional opportunities to provide financial support or stipends to students enrolled in these programs to address student needs while they obtain training.

Increase funding for apprenticeships. In addition to increasing investments in credentialing programs, tackling the skills gap in Maryland will require an increased focus on apprenticeships, which provide students on-the-job training in addition to their coursework. Apprenticeships also allow students to gain early entry into a labor market and develop relationships with businesses seeking skilled workers.²⁷ Maryland has a robust apprenticeship program, but we must grow and expand the program to ensure that we are creating opportunities and driving workforce growth in essential areas. As governor, Wes will increase funding for apprenticeships and work with labor organizations and the business community to drive students into high-demand and high-paying jobs in high-demand fields like quantum computing, IT, cybersecurity, health care and advanced manufacturing.

Make Higher Education More Affordable

Increase funding for financial aid. In order to remain globally competitive, Maryland needs to produce highly-educated and skilled workers in critical fields like engineering,

²⁴ "Lack of Access to Skills Training Hurts Maryland's Workers ..." National Skills Coalition, 2020.

<https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MD-Skills-Mismatch-Fact-Sheet-2020.pdf>

²⁵ Fish, Tom. "16 Tech Jobs That Pay over \$65k a Year and Don't Require a College Degree." Newsweek. Newsweek, April 8, 2021.

<https://www.newsweek.com/tech-jobs-pay-over-70k-year-dont-require-college-degree-1579994>.

²⁶ "Lack of Access to Skills Training Hurts Maryland's Workers ..." National Skills Coalition, 2020.

<https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MD-Skills-Mismatch-Fact-Sheet-2020.pdf>

²⁷ Goger, Annelies, and Chenoah Sinclair. "Apprenticeships Are an Overlooked Solution for Creating More Access to Quality Jobs." Brookings. Brookings, January 27, 2021.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/01/27/apprenticeships-are-an-overlooked-solution-for-creating-more-access-to-quality-jobs/>.

computer science, and medicine. Unfortunately, the cost of higher education continues to rise and the burden of student loan debt can dissuade students from obtaining degrees. A 2019 study ranked Maryland as the 43rd worst state for student loan debt, with nearly 50% of students graduating with debt, the average graduate leaving school owing \$32,165.²⁸ The same study found that the amount of student loan debt increased more than 8% from the previous year.²⁹ As governor, Wes will combat the rising student loan debt crisis and invest in financial aid. He will also work to expand Maryland's Student Loan Debt Relief Tax Credit Program to provide additional support to students who have already accrued debt.

Create new pathways to higher education by making Maryland's Community College Promise Program more accessible. Maryland's new Community College Promise Program creates a tuition-free pathway to a degree or credential for thousands of students in need. However, there are expected to be thousands more applicants than available slots.³⁰ Our economy cannot thrive unless we have a highly-skilled and active workforce. With nearly 200,000 Marylanders still out of work, and nearly as many jobs unfilled, it is essential that we increase the current investment and get thousands of students off of waitlists and into programs.³¹ Wes will take action to get this done and he will also expand the criteria so that students can benefit from additional degree and credentialing programs to address workforce shortages in key areas, and he will ensure that part-time students can benefit from programs while they work or support their families. Additionally, making this cost-saving program available to students will create new pathways into four-year institutions by alleviating the expense of the first two years and lowering student loan burdens.

Implement a Service Year Option program. Wes recognizes that approaching high school graduation without a definitive plan on next steps can be daunting for some students, especially those who are not ready to enroll in higher education, may not have the skills they need to step into the workforce or are unsure of what career is right for them. These students need additional support and experience that will set them on a path to success. That is why Wes will implement a Service Year Option program that will be integrated into the implementation of Kirwan, enabling Maryland high school graduates to serve for a year in a public service role in exchange for job training, mentorship, and other support, including compensatory tuition at a Maryland college or university. This program will build a stronger sense of community and service across the state and create new opportunities for students to access good jobs.

²⁸ Brown, Mike. "Student Loan Debt by School by State Report." LendEDU, April 27, 2021.

<https://lendedu.com/blog/student-loan-debt-by-school-by-state/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Maryland Higher Education Commission Maryland Higher Education Commission." Maryland Higher Education Commission, n.d. https://dbm.maryland.gov/Documents/MFR_documents/2022/Maryland-Higher-Education-Commission-MFR.pdf.

³¹ Douglas-Gabriel, Danielle. "Why 3,000 People Are Still Waiting for Maryland's Community College Scholarship." The Washington Post, October 5, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/10/03/why-3000-people-are-still-waiting-marylands-community-college-scholarship/>.

Lift up Every Maryland Family

Accelerate the minimum wage increase to \$15 per hour. Wes was proud to see Maryland take action and pass legislation to gradually increase the minimum wage over the next several years. However, as the cost of living continues to increase across the nation, Marylanders cannot wait until 2025 for a \$15 minimum wage. As governor, Wes will accelerate the \$15 minimum wage increase to 2023 and he will explore opportunities to ensure that the minimum wage continues to increase as inflation and cost of living rise. Wes will also work with small businesses to identify ways in which the state can support this acceleration through financial incentives or other means.

Ensure passage of a comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave program. In Maryland, more than 60% of workers lack access to paid family and medical leave.³² That means that when a family welcomes a new child, or a person or their loved one becomes ill, too many Marylanders are forced to choose between their paycheck or their wellbeing. This was especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic as millions of women were forced to leave the workforce to care for a child or loved one, and workers of color who were already more likely to work in low-income jobs lacked this benefit the most.³³ As the wealthiest state in the nation, we must do better for our workers and our families. Wes firmly believes it is past time that we take action and pass a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program -- and 88% of Marylanders agree.³⁴ As governor, Wes will work with the legislature to pass this legislation during the first legislative session of his term.

³² "Time To Care A Safety Net For Maryland Families." Time to Care, 2021.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f9877a3f28da201f50f6006/t/60c780e54a25e73bb1fedaa5/1623687398109/06-2021+TTC+Infographic.pdf>.

³³ "Policy Paper: Paid Family and Medical Leave." Strong Future Maryland, n.d.

<https://strongfuturemd.org/policy-paper-paid-family-and-medical-leave/>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*