Democracy

Modernizing The Vote

In April, Marylanders across the state celebrated the Maryland General Assembly’s passage of the Secure and Accessible Registration Act, a bill to implement automatic voter registration (AVR) in Maryland.

In another victory for voting rights, the Assembly also passed a constitutional amendment to enable Election Day registration in Maryland, a measure that will be up for voter authorization on November’s ballot.

Maryland PIRG and the Everyone Votes Maryland coalition worked for years to pass these important reforms, building bipartisan support in the Assembly and rallying the public to call on our elected leaders to join states across the country in implementing these crucial voting modernization measures.

Encouraging New Voters

Together, AVR, early voting and Election Day registration will streamline the voter registration process by updating voter rolls when Marylanders interact with certain state agencies, including the Motor Vehicle Administration.

Under these new policies, voters will be registered at state agencies unless they opt out, modernizing our democratic system while making it more accessible, cost-efficient and secure.

If the measure is authorized by voters in November, the Assembly will finalize the process for Election Day registration during the 2019 session. Election Day registration would ensure that fewer eligible voters are barred from casting their ballots because of needless administrative delays and deadlines, thereby decreasing the number of provisional ballots that must be counted.

Bipartisan Support Wins

Thanks to work by Maryland PIRG, our supporters, and our coalition partners, modernizing voter registration and elections is a bipartisan issue in our state. With support from both sides of the aisle for AVR and other reforms we’ve helped pass in recent years, Maryland has become a national leader in bringing our democratic system into the 21st century.

Public Health

Hold The Antibiotics, McDonald’s

The meat industry vastly overuses antibiotics, making them less effective when we get sick. Given the lack of federal action, Maryland PIRG is seeking to save antibiotics through corporate action.

Along with our national network, we’ve helped convince McDonald’s, Subway and KFC to stop serving chicken raised on human antibiotics. Thanks to your support, these commitments are changing the industry, all the way to the meat you buy for your dinner table. The most recent FDA data shows that sales of medically important antibiotics for food production fell for the first time since recordkeeping began.

But with 23,000 Americans dying each year from antibiotic-resistant infections, we need more action. With your help, we’re calling on McDonald’s to take the next step by getting our life-saving medicines out of its entire supply chain.

Maryland PIRG
Standing Up To Powerful Interests

Maryland Public Interest Research Group
Citizen Agenda: An Update For Members Of Maryland PIRG
Summer 2018 • Vol. 31, No. 2
Find links to resources and actions at www.marylandpirg.org

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Product Safety

Asbestos Shouldn’t Be In Kids’ Makeup

In 2018, we shouldn’t tolerate the sale of products that contain toxics—especially products marketed to children.

Yet research done by Maryland PIRG Foundation has revealed lead in toys, chemicals linked to cancer in personal care products, and most recently, asbestos hiding in kids’ shimmery makeup.

Our sister group’s report, “In Your Face,” found that three different products sold by Claire’s contained asbestos, with one containing more than 150,000 fibers of asbestos per gram of product.

We quickly alerted Claire’s to these test results, and asked the company to recall the items and inform customers immediately. We’re also calling on Congress to pass legislation that will protect our kids by requiring appropriate testing and labeling of cosmetics.

Protect Your Credit

Consumers Deserve More After Equifax

When Equifax lost the critical financial data of nearly 148 million Americans last year, it was a startling reminder that we need a lot more control over our personal information.

Thanks to the advocacy of Maryland PIRG and the Office of the Attorney General, the Maryland General Assembly passed a new law that gives Marylanders free access to credit freezes, thaws and temporary lifts at all three credit agencies.

Freezing your credit at all three national credit bureaus, now a right under Maryland law, is the best action consumers can take to protect their financial data post-Equifax, whether they were affected by the breach or not.

With your support, Maryland PIRG will continue working to ensure you have the tools you need to protect yourself from identity thieves.

Defend Net Neutrality

A Free And Open Internet Is Worth Defending

When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decided to repeal net neutrality protections last December, Maryland PIRG mobilized our members and supporters to defend a free and open internet.

By empowering internet service providers like Comcast, Verizon and AT&T to potentially block or slow down lawful content, or create internet “fast lanes” that would favor certain sites and content over others, the FCC’s decision will suppress consumer choice and fair competition online.

With your support, Maryland PIRG ran several online campaigns to raise awareness and rally support for net neutrality, focusing on a bill in Congress that would overturn the FCC’s decision. As of this writing, the legislation is under consideration in the Senate and House.

Democracy

Empowering Small Donors

A newly implemented political funding system is shifting power back to Maryland voters.

The Montgomery County Public Election Fund, a program that aims to amplify the voices of voters by matching contributions from small donors, is already showing that candidates for elected office are turning to everyday Marylanders to fund their election bids instead of mega-donors and corporations.

According to research by Maryland PIRG Foundation, candidates in the matching program have raised 58 percent more money from small donors. Even better, candidates receiving matching funds have raised 94 percent of their campaign funding from small donations—versus only 8 percent for those not participating in the program.

Small donor matching programs are gaining traction across the state. In January, a bill to establish a small donor program was introduced in Prince George’s County.

Maryland PIRG and Maryland PIRG Foundation gratefully accept bequests, beneficiary designations of IRAs and life insurance, and gifts of securities to support our work for consumers and toward a healthy democracy in our state.

For information, call (800) 841-7299, or email plannedgiving@marylandpirg.org
Defending The Protections Americans Rely On

After the 2008 economic crisis, millions of Americans lost their jobs, their homes, their retirement savings and more. That’s why Maryland PIRG played a lead role in setting up a consumer protection agency, and helped put in place rules of the road to keep Wall Street in check.

These rules help ensure a fair and competitive marketplace that keeps consumers’ best interests in mind. And the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has returned nearly $12 billion to more than 29 million consumers. But now, in the name of regulatory reform, Wall Street, big banks and their allies in Congress are working to strip away these vital consumer protections.

With the support of our members, Maryland PIRG is able to push back on behalf of the public when consumers are put at risk of wrongdoing.

Opposing Anti-Consumer Attacks In Washington

We’re on the ground in Annapolis and Washington, D.C., keeping an eye on threats to commonsense consumer protections.

We’ve been successful in stopping legislation that would change the funding and leadership structure of the Consumer Bureau, both of which are key to the agency’s past success and continued independence. And we’ve been hard at work opposing the anti-consumer moves of Mick Mulvaney, who has been limiting the Consumer Bureau’s capabilities since the president put him in charge of the agency in November.

Another major threat to consumers in the past few months has been S. 2155, a bank deregulation bill that, despite supporters’ claims, would likely increase mortgage fraud, racial discrimination and risky banking practices. The legislation would also replace stronger state laws against identity theft, potentially deny servicemembers their right to a day in court, and more.

With your support, our advocates have been fiercely opposing this legislation to let Equifax and big banks off the hook, and calling on decision-makers at the state and national levels to instead enact reforms to give consumers more control over our financial lives.

Solutions To Problems We All Face

Whether it’s defending the original mission of the Consumer Bureau or opposing bills that ignore the painful lessons of the 2008 financial crisis, Maryland PIRG works to unite people from across the political spectrum around commonsense solutions to problems we all face.

But we couldn’t do any of this without the support of members like you. With you by our side, we’ll continue defending consumers and working toward a safer, healthier, more secure future.

Thanks To You

Dear Maryland PIRG member,

By the time you read this letter, our summer door-to-door canvass will be in full swing. In an age of email and social media, this annual effort might seem old-fashioned, but it’s as necessary as ever.

This summer, Maryland PIRG and our national network are rallying support in 22 states to preserve our life-saving antibiotics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least 23,000 people die every year from antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and experts point to antibiotic overuse on industrial farms as one of the main factors.

In 2017, we helped pass a Maryland law to ban the overuse of antibiotics on farms in our state. And over the past few years, we’ve helped convince restaurants like Subway and KFC to take action as well. Now, we’re calling on McDonald’s to get our life-saving medicines out of its entire meat supply chain, a big commitment that would help protect public health and save lives.

The summer canvass also gives us an opportunity to reach people who might not otherwise hear about this problem and what we can do to solve it. And even for those who might not agree with us, it’s harder to ignore a canvasser at your door than a report from a news source you don’t like.

I’m so grateful for your current support, and I’m excited to see what your support will accomplish this summer and beyond.

Sincerely,

Emily Scarr, State Director
info@marylandpirg.org
21st Century Transportation

Paving The Way For Electric Transportation

Sales of electric vehicles nationwide increased 38 percent in 2016, and another 32 percent in 2017, according to a February report from Maryland PIRG Foundation and Frontier Group.

Maryland can accelerate this progress, and also transition to electric school and transit buses, by taking advantage of our portion of the $2.9 billion settlement of Volkswagen’s massive emissions scandal intended for environmental mitigation actions.

Another report released in May by Maryland PIRG Foundation and Frontier Group shows the majority of America’s buses remain dirty—but clean, all-electric buses are available, and they’re cheaper for school districts and transit agencies to run in the long term.

A REVOLUTION ON OUR ROADS—The number of electric vehicles on America’s streets is at an all-time high, but are our cities ready to accommodate this rise in clean cars?

An all-electric transportation future offers many benefits, including cleaner air and the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. With your support, we can leave federal inaction in the slow lane and put our communities on a fast track to a cleaner, healthier future.