



1420 N. CHARLES ST.  
BALTIMORE, MD 21201

T: 410.837.6190  
F: 410.837.6168

[WWW.UBALT.EDU](http://WWW.UBALT.EDU)

Office of University Relations

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Contact: Chris Hart  
410.837.5739  
[chart@ubalt.edu](mailto:chart@ubalt.edu)

## **Education Tops Marylander's Concerns in Annual Schaefer Center Survey**

*State Budget, Health Care, Taxes Also Top List*

For the first time in many years, concerns about public education top the public's list of the most important problems facing Maryland legislators in 2007, with 16 percent of Marylanders citing public education as the most important issue facing the state in the annual "Maryland Policy Choices" survey conducted by the Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore. Other issues cited by substantial numbers of respondents include the state budget (11 percent), health care (nine percent), and taxes (nine percent). The state budget and taxes continue to be concerns for Marylanders, but most respondents expected the state's economic situation to either stay the same (53 percent) or get better (22 percent) in the coming year.

The telephone survey, conducted by the Schaefer Center in early December and involving 810 randomly selected adult Maryland residents, found that Marylanders believe high school students face a world in which they will need advanced levels of skills in order to make a living. There was near unanimity that high school students should be required to reach a minimal level of skill in subjects like English and math, with 85 percent favoring the requirement of an examination to ensure a minimum skill level.

When compared to last year's survey results, more Marylanders (62 percent) believe that illegal immigration is a major problem for the United States, and they would like to restrict driver's licenses to legal immigrants and limit the length of their licenses to the length of their visas. Marylanders, however, are not anti-immigrant. A full 80 percent believe that legal immigration makes American society stronger.

"Maryland Policy Choices: 2007" provides a guide to the issues that could end up dominating the legislative session this year. Survey highlights include:

- The majority of Maryland residents (75 percent) are generally optimistic that the economy will remain strong or improve in the coming year, but 55 percent believe that state government does only a fair or poor job in solving major problems.
- Half of those surveyed think their personal economic situation will remain the same in 2007, while 34 percent think it will get better.

- A vast majority of respondents identified controlling crime (83 percent) and improving public education (80 percent) as “very important” priorities for Maryland. Respondents also cited developing and keeping jobs (70 percent), protecting the environment (63 percent), and protecting the public from terrorist attacks (62 percent) as very important priorities for the state.
- When asked about illegal immigration, 62 percent of respondents indicated that it was a major problem for the country, but less so in Maryland (38 percent) and even less problematic in their communities (20 percent). The percentage of people who think illegal immigration is a major problem for the U.S. increased by 12 percent over last year’s findings.
- When asked what made illegal immigration a problem, 39 percent cited concerns about its impact on the economy and jobs, 27 percent cited terrorism and security concerns, and 19 percent cited the impact of illegal immigration on American culture.
- Marylanders draw a sharp distinction between legal and illegal immigration. Just over 75 percent of respondents indicated that legal immigration makes the U.S. society stronger, while 80 percent think that illegal immigration makes society weaker.
- A large majority (76 percent) of Marylanders oppose issuing driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants. Even more Marylanders (83 percent) favor limiting the valid period for driver’s licenses for non-citizens to the exact period covered by their visas instead of giving them licenses for the standard five-year period.
- Ninety percent of those respondents who voted in the general election did so in-person at their local polling precincts. Ninety-seven percent reported they were able to cast their ballots without problem; only one percent reported experiencing a problem with voting machines.
- Just under half (45 percent) of the respondents favor legalizing slot machines in Maryland. Interestingly, almost one-fifth of the respondents (19 percent) had no opinion on the issue. Of those who favor slot machines, the majority did so for economic reasons. Forty-six percent support slots because they think Maryland needs the revenues; 21 percent do not want slot revenue going to Delaware or Virginia; and 13 percent think slots are a better alternative than raising taxes.
- Of the 35 percent of respondents who oppose slots, most (31 percent) think slots will harm poor people, and 20 percent fear the crime associated with gambling. A significant minority (19 percent) stated they are morally opposed to gambling.
- Half of the respondents (51 percent) oppose casino gambling in Maryland. However, if slot machines or casino gambling were legalized, 79 percent favor locating the facilities at racetracks. Less than half of the respondents (42 percent) favor locating gambling facilities in tourist areas, and 77 percent oppose allowing gambling in any commercial area.
- When asked how easy it is to predict their commute time, almost half (49 percent) think it is “very easy” to predict the length of their commute time and 31 percent indicate it is “somewhat easy.”

- The majority of respondents (53 percent) indicated that their commute was five minutes or less, and a minority (7 percent) indicated that their commute was greater than 30 minutes.

Established in 1985, the Schaefer Center for Public Policy brings the University of Baltimore's academic experience to bear in solving problems faced by government and nonprofit organizations through five primary services: strategic planning, performance measurement, program evaluation/analysis, opinion research, and management training.

The University of Baltimore is a member of the University System of Maryland and comprises the School of Law, the Yale Gordon College of Liberal Arts and the Merrick School of Business.