



Maryland Ranked 46th for Overall Freedom in America

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Maryland was ranked 46th for “Overall Freedom” by [“Freedom in the 50 States 2016 | Cato Institute”](#).

Maryland is always one of the least free states in the country, although it encounters nowhere near the difficulty facing New York, California, or Illinois, and it enjoys locational rents from its proximity to Washington, D.C. Moreover, we show Maryland’s personal freedom rank gradually increasing over time.

Maryland’s overall tax burden is about average: the state-level component a little below and the local component a little above, making for a favorable degree of fiscal decentralization. However, Marylanders have little choice in local government, with only one competing jurisdiction per 200 square miles. Also, state-level taxes have risen over time, from 4.6 percent of personal income in FY 2009 to a projected 5.5 percent in FY 2015. Although it is less indebted than other states and also features lower government employment, Maryland spends more than average on subsidies to business.

Maryland does poorly on the most important component of regulatory policy, land-use freedom. Zoning restrictions are extensive, eminent domain abuse is mostly unchecked, and some local rent control exists. The state enacted a new minimum wage in 2013–14, though it is still pretty modest, and has no right-to-work law. As of 2010, Maryland had some of the most extensive mandated benefits for small-group plans in the country, but time will tell whether they have carried over to the post-PPACA world. Cable and telecommunications have not been deregulated. Occupational freedom is extremely low, for health professions and for others. By one measure (index of statutory mentions of regulatory keywords), Maryland has the most licensed occupations in the country. It also has a hospital certificate-of-need law and both general and gasoline-focused anti-sales-below-cost laws. Its tort system is only about average. Maryland is an average state on criminal justice, the most important category of personal freedom. Crime-adjusted incarceration rates are a bit below the national average, but drug arrest rates are well above, though they have fallen from the heights of the mid-2000s. The state’s asset

forfeiture law is stronger than average. Smoking bans are comprehensive, and cigarette taxes are very high, encouraging smuggling (\$1.70 a pack in 2006 dollars).

Educational freedom is among the lowest in the country. Homeschools and private schools are tightly regulated, the latter more so (mandatory state approval and teacher licensing). The state raised the years of compulsory schooling from 11 to 12 in 2013–14. Maryland raised its travel freedom score by allowing illegal immigrants to get driver’s licenses in 2013–14. It also raised its cannabis freedom score substantially by enacting a “real” medical marijuana law and decriminalizing small-scale possession. Maryland has always been one of the best states for alcohol freedom because of privatization and low taxes; however, beer taxes were hiked substantially in 2011–14. The state has sharply limited firearms freedom. It does allow Class III weapons other than machine guns, but it also mandates locking devices, registers handgun owners, requires licensing with safety training for handgun purchasers, licenses dealers, bans possession for those under 21, bans certain types of guns and magazines, and makes it extremely difficult to get permission to carry in public.

