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Maryland the least-free state in U.S.

By: [Alan Suderman](#)**Examiner Staff Writer****06/03/09 10:00 PM EDT**

Its nickname may be the “Free State,” but Maryland is ranked the worst in the country for personal freedoms, according to a study released by a local university.

The state’s strict gun-control laws and restrictions on home schooling combined with restrictions against civil unions and tough marijuana laws make Maryland “the worst of both worlds,” according to Jason Sorens, one of the study’s authors.

“Maryland seems to have a lot of the restrictions that conservative states have, as well as restrictions on personal freedoms that liberal states have,” Sorens said.

The study used a wide swath of comparative data to determine personal freedoms, including alcohol and drug laws, asset forfeiture rules, and education regulations. It also compared taxes and labor polices to rank economic freedoms, and put Maryland 34th on that list.

The study was released by the Mercatus Center, a nonprofit public policy research center affiliated with George Mason University.

Chris Edwards, scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute, said economic freedoms are most important to a state’s well-being, but stressed that the two go hand in hand.

“The states that have the most personal freedom tend to have the most economic freedom,” he said.

Virginia ranked ninth in the country in the study’s ranking of personal freedoms. The District wasn’t included in the study, but Sorens said he thought it would have a “pretty low” ranking.

Maryland state Sen. Alex Mooney, R-Frederick, said he was not surprised by the study’s findings and said he has seen a steady erosion of personal freedom at the General Assembly.

“There’s too many elected officials who believe in big government,” he said.



Mooney added that the state's recent decision to expand the use of speed cameras throughout the state was a "perfect example" of big government triumphing over personal liberties. He said it was disappointing that a recent petition drive to force a state referendum on the use of speed cameras fell short of obtaining enough signatures.

"Voters need to wake up and realize that their freedoms are being lost slowly and surely in this state and have a revolution at the ballot box," he said. "We don't want to head down the road of big government surveying you."

Gov. Martin O'Malley's spokesman defended the state's reputation on personal liberties.

"The governor obviously took an oath to uphold the laws and the personal freedoms of every Maryland citizen and has done so," spokesman Shaun Adamec said, adding that the state strives to find a "delicate balance" between preserving individual freedoms and protecting the public's safety.

Sorens said the point of the study was to provide policymakers with data to compare freedom levels among states, noting that there is a cost to having fewer personal and economic freedoms. He said data show that, all other things being equal, people will choose freer states.

Recent figures showing that the number of high-income taxpayers in Maryland has dropped by one-third a year after the state passed a millionaire's tax could prove his point, Sorens said.

Bill Myers contributed to this report.

RATING FREEDOM

Top ten states for personal freedom:

1. Alaska
2. Maine
3. New Mexico
4. Arkansas
5. Texas
6. Missouri
7. Oregon
8. Idaho
9. Virginia
10. Wyoming

Worst states for personal freedom:

1. Maryland
2. Illinois
3. New York

4. Rhode Island
5. Ohio
6. New Jersey
7. Massachusetts
8. Alabama
9. Georgia
10. South Carolina

MEASURES OF FREEDOM


Some of the policies and regulations the authors studied:

- Education policy
- Gun laws
- Liquor laws
- Driving restrictions
- Campaign finance regulations
- Marijuana policies
- “Victimless” crime enforcement
- Civil union policy
- Smoking bans

Source: Mercatus Center, George Mason University

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