

O'Malley Hopes the Numbers Add Up

Program Offers Accountability Through Statistics

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Friday, February 16, 2007; B01

Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) offered his Cabinet a preview of coming attractions yesterday, outlining his plans for a statistics-driven government accountability program that he is bringing with him from Baltimore.

What was known as CitiStat during O'Malley's tenure as mayor is being christened as StateStat in Annapolis. It will eventually require biweekly appearances by department heads to explain a bevy of statistical trends occurring on their watch to the governor and his staff.

That could include such varied indicators as water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, spending on guards' overtime at state prisons and the percentage of woman- and minority-owned contractors being used by state agencies.

"We'll be collecting a ton of information," O'Malley said during a Cabinet meeting yesterday morning, part of which was open to the media.

During a half-hour presentation in which the new governor alternately sounded like a policy wonk and deadpan comic, O'Malley acknowledged there would probably be growing pains.

Some bureaucrats will complain that they are spending too much time gathering numbers. Others will be upset that their agency's recently purchased "Gucci" software is not compatible with that needed to generate StateStat presentations. Eventually, though, "it will come for people like pouring the coffee," O'Malley said.

And in the process, he said, StateStat will drive "the genie of openness and transparency and accountability out of the bottle."

With a projected budget shortfall next year of \$1.3 billion, the O'Malley administration is hoping the exercise will save some money.

During O'Malley's seven years in Baltimore, the program saved the city about \$350 million, O'Malley spokesman Rick Abbruzzese said. With a state budget about 15 times larger than that of the city, savings for the state "could be substantial," Abbruzzese said.

Baltimore initially borrowed a version of the program from New York for its police force. As part of that effort, commanders are questioned by their superiors about violent crime trends and make changes in officer deployments based on what the numbers show.

O'Malley later expanded CitiStat to other departments, measuring such things as spending on overtime, garbage truck breakdowns and the time it took to fill potholes.

In 2004, the program received an award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and its meetings have drawn a steady stream of visitors from across the nation -- and in some cases, beyond -- seeking to replicate it.

O'Malley launched the first part of the state program yesterday with an executive order creating BayStat. It will be a joint effort by four Cabinet departments that will try to track water quality, nutrient loads, fisheries and other indicators of the bay's health.

The full-blown StateStat requires legislation that is expected to pass this session. Republicans are not resisting the program, but some have voiced skepticism about whether it will generate any more savings than past government efficiency exercises.

"The jury's out," said House Minority Leader Anthony J. O'Donnell (R-Calvert). "I'm taking a wait-and-see approach."