

MARYLAND

Delegate Rawlings, a champion of education, dies at 66

By Robert Redding Jr.
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Maryland Delegate Howard P. Rawlings, an influential lawmaker who helped impose reforms on public schools in Baltimore and Prince George's County, died yesterday at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore after a long bout with bladder cancer. He was 66.

Mr. Rawlings, Baltimore Democrat, was a driving force in reforms in the Prince George's County public school system. Its current appointed school board is one result of his efforts.

He was a "legislator who had the courage of his convictions," said state Sen. Ulysses Currie, Prince George's Democrat and chairman of the Budget and Taxation Committee. "He was convinced that the Prince George's school system could and should be one of the [best] in the state."

Beatrice P. Tignor, chairman of the Prince George's County school board, said Mr. Rawlings was "a champion for excellence in education."

"And we have lost a genuine public servant, whose legacy not only impacts education but also the breadth of state government," said Miss Tignor, a former Democratic delegate.

In Baltimore, political leaders said his death was a serious blow to the city, which has seen its political power diminish at the same time its need for financial aid from the state is increasing.

"Things are bad already. They are just going to get worse," said City Council member Kenneth Harris, who described Mr. Rawlings as "one of the most powerful and respected legislators in

Annapolis, and one of the most influential African-American leaders in the state."

Mr. Rawlings' influence extended beyond the boundaries of his native city. As chairman of the House Appropriations Committee for the past 12 years, he played a major role in shaping state fiscal and tax policies.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch, Anne Arundel County Democrat, called Mr. Rawlings was "a very large man who cast a very large shadow over the political spectrum."

"At least in my time in the Maryland General Assembly, I can think of no one else who has had a greater influence on legislation affecting the state of Maryland and the city of Baltimore," Mr. Busch said.

"He was the guy [who] came out of public housing and treasured his education opportunities," Mr. Busch said. "He believed the key to success for minorities and for working-class people was to gain the education to succeed in the workforce and to participate in all the rich benefits of being part of the American dream."

Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele said he and Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. were "very shocked and saddened

by Pete's loss."

"He was a giant," Mr. Steele, a Republican, said, adding that he and Mr. Rawlings would often "bump heads in a very good way."

Mr. Rawlings grew up in Baltimore and went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics. He taught mathematics in college and was an administrator at Baltimore City Community College.

He was elected to the legislature in 1978 and in less than a decade was chosen as vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee, which regulates spending to state agencies. He became committee chairman in 1992.

A statement issued on behalf of his family said education was his passion, and "until the end of his life, he fought to make sure that all children in the state received the best education."

Mr. Rawlings is survived by his wife, Nina Cole Rawlings; and three children — Wendell Rawlings, Lisa Rawlings and Stephanie Rawlings Blake, a member of the Baltimore City Council.

His son is a member of the Democratic State Central Committee. Delegate Salima Siler Marriott, Baltimore Democrat, said the younger Mr. Rawlings may be chosen to fill out the remaining three years in his father's term.

• This article is based in part on wire service reports.