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For anyone asking if associations are still relevant, the Maryland Association of CPAs has an emphatic, one-word answer: Yes.

The MACPA and its members drove that point home during the 2015 session of

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- The second (HB 164 / SB 301) changes Maryland's appeal bond law by adding a \$100 million cap on such bonds. Here's why the measure is important: Due to the increasing complexity of business today, it is not unusual to see lawsuits with extraordinarily high damages and a high possibility of questionable verdicts in lower courts. This puts Maryland CPAs in an awkward position of having to post a bond that could bankrupt or financially harm a firm or business in order to pursue the matter further in the appellate process. The bill provides some important liability protection for Maryland's largest CPA firms.

The MACPA had also sought an additional cap of \$1 million for small businesses, but that provision was removed from the final version of the bills. The MACPA will continue to work to add that cap for smaller CPA firms in future General Assembly sessions.

"This is what we do. Legislative advocacy is the one thing an association can do that no one else will do for our members," said MACPA Executive Director Tom Hood, CPA. "Our members don't have the time or the resources to do this type of advocacy on the scale that will positively impact the entire profession. The MACPA does."

"Maryland's General Assembly considers hundreds, if not thousands, of bills each spring," Hood added. "It's the MACPA's job to monitor those bills, to fight for the ones that will protect our profession and fight against the ones that will hurt us. That's the value of a professional association. We do the things that CPAs can't do on their own."

Mobilizing a profession

The "attest" correction moved through the legislature rather smoothly, but the appeal bond cap provided a few more challenges — and was a prime example of how

an association can marshal its forces to move mountains.

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200 CPAs turned out in January for CPA Day in Annapolis, the MACPA's annual legislative call to arms. MACPA members spent the day meeting face to face with their legislators and discussing issues that impact the profession.

Then the real work began.

As the General Assembly session was winding down in April, it became clear that the appeal bond measure was in danger of stalling in committee. While the MACPA's lobbyists went to work, the association called upon its legislatively active members to contact their legislators and get the bills moving in the right direction. This "Key Person" Program is one of the most important pieces of the MACPA's legislative puzzle, and it didn't disappoint.

With MACPA members contacting key legislative contacts just hours before the General Assembly session ended, legislators were convinced to move the measure out of committee and let the entire legislative body vote on the measure. A few amendments aside, the bill passed.

"This is a huge win in support of firms in general but larger firms specifically," said Lisa Cines, CPA, regional partner in charge of business development and marketing

at Dixon Hughes Goodman. "Due to the level of insurance that we carry, we are often targets of suits, and the cost of the appeal bond could influence a decision to appeal an award. The legislation puts Maryland on a more level playing field with other states so that we are not seen as a state that is unfriendly to business."

Without someone diligently watching out for — and acting on — legislation that impacts CPAs and their clients, it might be a lot harder for CPAs to do business in Maryland.

“The MACPA team has done a great job of staying focused on the issues that are most

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