



## **An Open Letter to the Community**

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### **Say “No” to Ambulance Fees**

Next week, the County Council will consider whether to charge a fee of \$300-\$800 for emergency ambulance transport to a hospital. We strongly oppose charging residents, businesses, and visitors for an essential government service, and we urge you to call the County Council to register your opposition.

#### **Will a 911 Fee Deter Calls?**

County officials say a fee won't deter someone from calling 911 in a medical emergency. In testimony to the Council, we presented statistics showing that EMS calls in Fairfax County increased steadily through 2004, decreased in 2005 (the year Fairfax County imposed an ambulance fee), and remained at pre-fee levels through 2007. While we don't know if ambulance fees caused this drop, we do know that County officials have offered no studies or analyses demonstrating that 911 fees won't deter people from calling 911 in an emergency. This is too important an issue to rely on guesswork by County officials.

#### **Costs to the Residents & Businesses**

County officials promise ambulance fee revenue is “free money” because residents will be billed only to the extent of their insurance. If this sounds too good to be true, that's because it is. Residents will certainly pay for the ambulance fees through higher insurance costs. When County officials asked insurance companies to commit, in writing, not to raise insurance rates in response to the 911 fee, the insurance companies balked. Does anyone really think that insurance companies will accept \$14 million in higher costs a year and not pass that along in the form of higher premiums to individuals and businesses?

## **More Bureaucracy Than Support to Local Fire/Rescue Departments**

Imposing an ambulance fee will increase County bureaucracy. According to the County's Office of Management and Budget, the administrative costs for the ambulance fee would approach \$2 million/year (5.5% of total revenue). The County would need to hire half a dozen new employees, some with salaries of more than \$100,000. These administrative costs are more than the County is proposing to share with all of the local fire/rescue departments combined.

## **Impact on Local Fire/Rescue Departments**

We believe an ambulance fee is fundamentally at odds with the notion of a volunteer community service. We don't understand how the County can charge hundreds of dollars for a service that often times is provided for free by volunteers and/or using apparatus and equipment provided by community fire/rescue departments. Imposing such a fee would undermine the close bond and accountability that is a hallmark of our community-based fire/rescue departments.

## **Opposition Groups**

We are not alone in opposing ambulance fees. Other groups that oppose the County's ambulance fee proposal include: Montgomery County Fire/Rescue Commission, Montgomery County Civic Federation, B-CC Chamber of Commerce, MC League of Women Voters, Town of Kensington Council, Western County Citizen's Advisory Board, Silver Spring Citizen's Advisory Board, and The Kensington Collation.

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We need your help. Please call or email the County Council at (240) 777-7900 or [county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov) to register your opposition to ambulance fees.

Sincerely,

Kenneth M. Yazge  
President