

Worksession

MEMORANDUM

April 7, 2011

TO: Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee
FROM: Amanda M. Mihill, Legislative Analyst *AMihill*
SUBJECT: **Worksession:** FY12 Operating Budget for the Board of Elections

Those expected for this worksession:

- Margaret Jurgensen, Elections Director, Board of Elections (BOE)
- Sara Harris, Deputy Elections Director, BOE
- Marjorie Roher, Management & Budget Specialist, BOE
- Bryan Hunt, Management and Budget Specialist, Office of Management and Budget

The Executive's recommendation for BOE is attached at ©1.

Overview

For FY12, the County Executive recommends total expenditures of \$4,891,160 for BOE, a 38.6% decrease from the FY11 approved budget.

(in \$000's)	FY10 Actual	FY11 Approved	FY12 CE Recommended	% Change FY11-FY12
Expenditures:				
General Fund	\$3,376,670	\$7,971,680	\$4,891,160	-38.6%
Grant Fund	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.0%
TOTAL Expenditures	\$3,376,670	\$7,971,680	\$4,891,160	-38.6%
Positions:				
Full-time	28	28	28	0.0%
Part-time	0	0	0	0.0%
TOTAL Positions	28	28	28	0.0%
WORKYEARS	46.2	43.9	40.3	-8.2%

The Executive is not recommending a change in the number of full-time or part-time positions.

The FY12 Executive recommendation is a decrease of \$18,970 from the FY11 approved budget from the following identified same services adjustments:

Identified Same Services Adjustments:	
Annualization of FY11 Personnel Costs	\$33,670
Retore Personnel Costs - Furloughs	\$33,670
Printing and Mail Adjustment	\$14,550
Motor Pool Rate Adjustment	\$1,690
Help Desk - Desk Side Support	\$800
Verizon Point to Point T1 Replacement	-\$5,450
Retirement Adjustment	-\$28,870
Annualization of FY11 Operating Expenses	-\$33,670
Group Insurance Adjustment	-\$35,360
Net same services adjustment total	-\$18,970

Public Hearing Testimony

The Council received correspondence from the League of Women Voters who noted that for the last comparable budget year (FY08), the BOE approved budget was approximately \$5.8 million. The League also noted that the County has an increasing number of registered voters and that with reduced staffing, longer processing times could result.

FY12 Expenditure Issues

Many of the Board's services are mandated by federal and state election law. Section 2-203 of the Election Law Article of the Maryland Code requires the County to appropriate funds to the local board of elections to cover the necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of its duties as prescribed by law.

1. Election Year Fluctuations (\$-2,102,900).

The BOE workload fluctuates according to the following four-year election cycle:

FY12-FY15 Election Cycle		
Year	Election	Fiscal Year
One	Presidential Primary	FY12
Two	Presidential General	FY13
Three	Local & Municipal	FY14
Four	State & County Primary and General	FY15

The recommended FY12 Operating Budget reflects this cycle and contains several cost changes associated with election cycle changes. Additionally, the County Board is subject to State Election Law, which has imposed several unfunded mandates and BOE must continue to follow ever-changing directives from the State Board of Elections. The table on the following page summarizes these election year fluctuations.

Item	Amount
Outside mail services to the State Board	-\$500
Operating expenses related to Election Day and Canvass	-\$3,010
Short term furniture rentals	-\$5,000
Metropolitan area travel for voter outreach	-\$9,880
Polling place supplies	-\$22,670
Building or space rental	-\$33,000
MD Voters maintenance cost	-\$39,080
Legal services/advertising	-\$47,000
Sample ballot printing contract	-\$52,500
Printing	-\$74,200
Sample ballot postage	-\$80,000
Early voting operations	-\$122,220
Election cycle overtime	-\$340,760
Election judge stipends	-\$606,480
Temporary clerical services	-\$666,600
Net Election Year Fluctuations Total	-\$2,102,900

2. Decrease Cost: Payments for the Touchscreen Voting Machines (-\$262,710)

The State Board requires the County to share a portion of the costs for the Touchscreen Voting Machines. The latest information from the State indicates a decreased payment amount will be required in FY12.

3. Decrease costs with service impacts (-\$695,940)

The Executive's recommended budget includes service impact reductions totaling \$695,940. These reductions are summarized below:

- **Sample ballot printing (-\$30,210); sample ballot postage (\$-30,400).** State law mandates that certain information be sent to each registered voter prior to each election; federal law requires that all election material be distributed in English and Spanish. Board staff proposes a smaller sample ballot that will include only legally mandated items and refer voters to the website for detailed information. Items expected to be removed from the sample ballot are the Board information page and the frequently asked questions page. This smaller ballot will require less postage.
- **Part-time temporary election aides (-\$72,070); temporary office clerical (-\$296,250).** Board staff indicate that reducing the number of temporary staff will put an additional workload on Board staff. These reductions could result in a slower response time for voters. Current election law has certain mandated deadlines that may require additional overtime to ensure that these deadlines are met if there are delays in receiving information or supplies from the State Board. Board staff believes that these potential delays are manageable in a primary election year.

- **Election overtime** (-\$182,490). Board staff indicate that reducing the amount of overtime funds available to Board staff could result in staff earning compensatory leave for work during the election. Overtime funds will need to be reserved for personnel who are ineligible to earn compensatory leave.
- **Electronic pollbook repairs/maintenance** (-\$63,340). The County must ensure that electronic pollbooks are maintained and repaired. The State has recommended a specific dollar amount for budgetary purposes. Board staff does not believe that this reduction will significantly impact operations in this election cycle because less equipment will be deployed to the polling places.
- **Local conference related education, tuition, training** (-\$6,000). State law mandates Board members and certain Board staff attend biennial meetings. Additionally, the Maryland Association of Election Officials holds an annual conference to discuss legislative, policy, and technology changes that members and staff attend. Board staff indicate that attendance at these conferences will be limited to mandated staff and information will be shared with other essential staff by those attending.
- **Other education, tuition, and training** (-\$14,380). To keep up with ever-changing election information, Board staff attend national and international workshops and conferences to learn new practices and network with peers. Board staff indicate that this reduction will result in decreased participation and attendance in these workshops and conferences.
- **Canvass expenses** (-\$800). The budget item provides meals for Board staff and Board members on Election Day and during the Canvass period. Based on past expenses, Board staff believes that this item can be reduced and still meet the Board's needs.

FY12 Revenue Issues

Revenues for the Board are calculated based on publication sales. State law mandates the fees charged for election publications, and sales are expected to produce \$2,500 in FY12.

Council Staff Recommendation

Council staff recommends supporting the Executive's recommended budget for BOE. Council staff cautions, however, that additional mandates or unexpected delays in materials from the State Board of Elections could result in additional BOE expenditures in FY12.

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Board of Elections

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Board of Elections is to register voters, conduct elections, assist persons seeking elective office with candidate filings and campaign fund reports, assist citizens seeking to place questions on the ballot, and preserve election data.

BUDGET OVERVIEW

The total recommended FY12 Operating Budget for the Montgomery County Board of Elections is \$4,891,160, a decrease of \$3,080,520 or 38.6 percent from the FY11 Approved Budget of \$7,971,680. Personnel Costs comprise 52.3 percent of the budget for 28 full-time positions for 40.3 workyears. Operating Expenses account for the remaining 47.7 percent of the FY12 budget.

LINKAGE TO COUNTY RESULT AREAS

While this program area supports all eight of the County Result Areas, the following are emphasized:

- ❖ **A Responsive, Accountable County Government**
- ❖ **Vital Living for All of Our Residents**

DEPARTMENT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Performance measures for this department are included below, with multi-program measures displayed at the front of this section and program-specific measures shown with the relevant program. The FY11 estimates incorporate the effect of the FY11 savings plan. FY12 and FY13 targets assume the recommended FY12 budget and FY13 funding for comparable service levels.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND INITIATIVES

- ❖ **Early Voting:** *In accordance with State mandates, the Board of Elections implemented Early Voting for the first time in the Gubernatorial Primary Election. Five locations were selected to serve the majority of the registered voters in Montgomery County that were accessible to public transportation, with adequate space and parking to accommodate Early Voting: Marilyn Praisner Community Center, Silver Spring Civic Building, Bauer Drive Recreation Center, Executive Office Building, and Germantown Recreation Center. Each Early Voting Center was open for a period of six days prior to each election to allow residents to vote at their convenience between the hours of 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. No problems were experienced during the Early Voting period and many positive comments regarding the early voting experience were received.*
- ❖ **Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard:** *The Board of Elections collaborated with DTS to create the Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard on their website which is accessible to the public or via MC311. The Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard allows voters to determine how long the wait is at each of the polling centers so they may determine the most convenient time and place to vote. Other jurisdictions across the country who have implemented this type of system have observed an increase in early voting participation as a result of this ability.*
- ❖ **Productivity Improvements**
 - **Election Judge Module:** *Now in the final production stage, Board of Elections staff and the Department of Technology Services created an Election Judge Module to provide needed flexibility in the current election environment with minimal staff data input. This SEQUEL based module tracks election judge assignments, work history, and payments; it will also provide an on-line ability for election judges to register for training, as well as track participation of high school students and parents in the Future Voter Initiative. The end result reduces the labor costs to handle phone calls, mailing, and paperwork filing.*
 - **Election Judge Payment Automation:** *Board of Elections staff is working with the ERP team to develop a mechanism that, beginning with the 2012 elections, will interface with the Election Judge module and the new Human Resources module of ERP to track which election judges earn enough of a stipend to require that the County issue a W-2 at the end of the year. This is expected to save over four weeks of data entry time per election cycle beginning in 2012.*

PROGRAM CONTACTS

Contact Margaret A. Jurgensen of the Montgomery County Board of Elections at 240.777.8523 or Bryan Hunt of the Office of Management and Budget at 240.777.2770 for more information regarding this department's operating budget.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Voter Registration Services

The Voter Registration Services program provides clerical and administrative support to register new voters and maintains the currency of information in the official registry. Currently, 622,401 registered voters are on file and the expected growth rate is 6 percent. The Federal Help America Vote Act mandated the establishment of a statewide voter registration database (MDVOTERS) that occurred in 2006 moving the County voter registration database to a statewide platform under aegis of the State Board of Elections. In addition, this program processes all changes of name, address, and party affiliation and maintains a delete file, removing voters for reasons of death, felony conviction, ineligibility for jury duty, moving out of the jurisdiction, and other valid legal reasons. The program provides legally-required training for volunteer registrars; responds to various voter and candidate requests for voter registration applications, listings, and CDs of registered voters; verifies nominating or referenda petitions submitted; and issues, and canvasses absentee and provisional ballots. Implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, on January 1, 1995, requires all motor vehicle and State social service agencies to solicit voter registration applications and information changes from every client or customer resulting in an increase in the number of applications and changes received for processing, many of which require research to clarify inaccurate or incomplete information. The program also tracks returned mail and sends a second mailing in order to accurately maintain the database.

Program Performance Measures	Actual FY09	Actual FY10	Estimated FY11	Target FY12	Target FY13
Number of Registered Voters (000s) ¹	565	570	575	580	580
Number of Voter Registration Transactions (000s) ²	250	240	300	250	250
Number of provisional ballots issued on election day(s) (see footnote 1) ³	5,400	NA	4,000	5,000	6,000
Number of absentee ballots requested (000s) (see footnote 1) ⁴	56	NA	35	25	60
Number of absentee ballots voted/returned (000s) ⁵	51	NA	15	12	40

¹ Active registered voters.

² FY11 - includes processing of three petitions.

³ FY09 - quantity for 2008 general election. FY10 - no elections. FY11 - actual for 2010 primary election plus estimate for 2010 general election; includes early voting. FY12 - estimate for 2012 presidential primary election. FY13 - estimate for 2012 presidential general election.

⁴ FY08 - 2008 presidential primary election. FY09 - 2008 presidential general election. FY10 - no elections in FY10. FY11 - actual number for 2010 gubernatorial primary election plus estimate for 2010 gubernatorial general election. FY12 - estimate for 2012 presidential primary election. FY13 - estimate for 2012 presidential general election.

⁵ FY09 - actual for 2008 presidential general election. FY10 - no elections. FY11 - actual for 2010 gubernatorial primary election plus estimate for 2010 gubernatorial general election; early voting initiated. FY12 - 2012 presidential primary election. FY13 - 2012 presidential general election.

FY12 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	WYs
FY11 Approved	1,786,880	17.5
Decrease Cost: Outside Mail Services to the State Board of Elections - Ballot Mailing Expenses	-500	0.0
Decrease Cost: Maintenance Cost - Statewide Election Management System (MDVoters)	-39,080	0.0
Reduce: Temporary Office Clerical	-296,250	0.0
Decrease Cost: Temporary Clerical Services	-666,600	-5.4
Miscellaneous adjustments, including restoration of employee furloughs, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting more than one program	371,690	2.4
FY12 CE Recommended	1,156,140	14.5

Election Operations

The Election Operations program provides administrative, clerical, and technical support for the conduct of local, State, and Federal elections. The Election Operations program assists individuals seeking elective office with candidate filings; provides information, guidance, and monitoring of required campaign committee filings and financial report submissions; delineates and maintains accurate precinct boundaries; prepares and produces various district and precinct maps; administers the results of redistricting; acquires and maintains required polling places; surveys and monitors compliance of handicapped accessibility at all polling places; obtains and provides all polling place supplies and logistics to properly equip the polling places for voting; and develops training materials, recruits, and trains election judges to staff the polling places. In 2010, the State of Maryland mandated the implementation of early voting in all jurisdictions. Montgomery County is required to provide staffing and supplies for five early voting centers, open ten hours per day, for seven days prior to each election.

An example of a four-year election cycle, is shown below.

Year One: Federal Primary Elections (FY12)
 Year Two: Federal General Elections (FY13)
 Year Three: Local and Municipal Elections (FY14)
 Year Four: Federal, State and County Primary and General Elections (FY15)

Program Performance Measures	Actual FY09	Actual FY10	Estimated FY11	Target FY12	Target FY13
Number of designated polling places per general election. ¹	243	NA	248	248	248
Number of election judges recruited, trained, and placed per general election (see footnote 1) ²	4,600	NA	2,700	5,000	5,000

¹ FY10 - No countywide elections. FY11 - two gubernatorial elections plus early voting at 5 voting centers. FY12 - Anticipate presidential primary election plus early voting at 5 voting centers. FY13 - presidential general election plus early voting at 5 voting centers.

² FY09 - for 2008 presidential general election plus an additional 2,600 voters were recruited and trained to serve as stand-by election judges. FY11 - the number of election judges for the 2010 gubernatorial general election includes five early voting centers. FY12 - 2012 presidential primary election. FY13 - 2012 presidential general election.

FY12 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	WYs
FY11 Approved	4,811,440	19.4
Decrease Cost: Short Term Furniture Rentals - Provides Tables and Chairs for Privately Owned Polling Places	-5,000	0.0
Decrease Cost: Metropolitan Area Travel for Voter Outreach	-9,880	0.0
Decrease Cost: Polling Place Supplies	-22,670	0.0
Decrease Cost: Building or Space Rental or Leases (Polling Place Rental)	-33,000	0.0
Reduce: Electronic Pollbook Computer Equipment Repairs/Maintenance	-63,340	0.0
Reduce: Part-Time Temporary Election Aides	-72,070	0.0
Decrease Cost: Printing	-74,200	0.0
Decrease Cost: Early Voting Operations	-122,220	0.0
Reduce: Election Overtime	-182,490	0.0
Decrease Cost: Payments for the Touchscreen Voting Machines	-262,710	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Cycle Overtime	-340,760	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Judge Stipends Due to One FY12 County-wide Election	-606,480	0.0
Miscellaneous adjustments, including restoration of employee furloughs, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting more than one program	-272,870	-0.6
FY12 CE Recommended	2,743,750	18.8

Administration

The Administration program of the Board of Elections includes budget development; fiscal control; administration of personnel and contractual issues; procurement; program planning and evaluation; and coordination and cooperation with Federal, State, and local government agencies, elected officials, and political organizations. This includes ensuring that the requirements of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act are met by providing all election related materials in both English and Spanish languages. The program is also responsible for providing accessible voting for all registered voters and coordinating all technology needs and activities with the State and County technology systems. Finally, the program is responsible for programming and coordinating resources for a voting system comprised of 3,120 Touchscreen voting machines, 850 express poll books, and 800 printers and required peripheral equipment for deployment to 243 polling places and 5 early voting centers located within Montgomery County.

Program Performance Measures	Actual FY09	Actual FY10	Estimated FY11	Target FY12	Target FY13
Number of electronic poll books prepared and used on election days (see footnote 1) ¹	820	250	1,900	860	860
Number of voting units prepared and used on election days (see footnote 1) ²	3,000	500	5,800	3,000	3,000
Total ballots cast (000s) (see footnote 1) ³	441	NA	330	150	560

¹ FY09 - 2008 general election. FY10 - no county-wide elections. FY11 - 2010 gubernatorial primary and general elections, 5 early voting sites prior to elections. FY12 - presidential primary election, 5 early voting sites. FY13 - presidential general election. Annually - student school board election, municipality elections.

² FY09 - 2008 general election. FY10 - no county-wide elections. FY11 - 2010 gubernatorial primary and general elections, 5 early voting sites. FY12 - presidential primary election, 5 early voting sites. FY13 - presidential general election, 5 early voting sites. Annual student school board election, municipality elections.

³ FY10 - no county-wide election. FY11 - actual from 2010 primary election plus estimate for 2010 general election; includes absentee, early voting and election day for both primary and general elections. FY12 - 2012 presidential primary election. FY13 - 2012 presidential general election.

FY12 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	WYs
FY11 Approved	1,373,360	7.0
Reduce: Canvass Expenses	-800	0.0

	Expenditures	WYs
Decrease Cost: Operating Expenses Directly Related to Election Day and Canvasses	-3,010	0.0
Reduce: Local Conference Related Education, Tuition, and Training	-6,000	0.0
Reduce: Other Education, Tuition, and Training	-14,380	0.0
Reduce: Sample Ballot Printing	-30,210	0.0
Reduce: Sample Ballot Postage (Other - Mail)	-30,400	0.0
Decrease Cost: Annualization of FY11 Operating Expenses	-33,670	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Cycle Changes - Legal Services and Advertising	-47,000	0.0
Decrease Cost: Sample Ballot Printing Contract	-52,500	0.0
Decrease Cost: Sample Ballot Postage	-80,000	0.0
Miscellaneous adjustments, including restoration of employee furloughs, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting more than one program	-84,120	0.0
FY12 CE Recommended	991,270	7.0

BUDGET SUMMARY

	Actual FY10	Budget FY11	Estimated FY11	Recommended FY12	% Chg Bud/Rec
COUNTY GENERAL FUND					
EXPENDITURES					
Salaries and Wages	1,858,751	3,067,140	3,330,810	2,077,620	-32.3%
Employee Benefits	502,839	632,500	788,220	482,570	-23.7%
County General Fund Personnel Costs	2,361,590	3,699,640	4,119,030	2,560,190	-30.8%
Operating Expenses	1,015,080	4,272,040	3,772,950	2,330,970	-45.4%
Capital Outlay	0	0	0	0	—
County General Fund Expenditures	3,376,670	7,971,680	7,891,980	4,891,160	-38.6%
PERSONNEL					
Full-Time	28	28	28	28	—
Part-Time	0	0	0	0	—
Workyears	46.2	43.9	43.9	40.3	-8.2%
REVENUES					
Publication Sales - Board of Elections	6,587	2,500	2,500	2,500	—
County General Fund Revenues	6,587	2,500	2,500	2,500	—

FY12 RECOMMENDED CHANGES

	Expenditures	WYs
COUNTY GENERAL FUND		
FY11 ORIGINAL APPROPRIATION	7,971,680	43.9
Changes (with service impacts)		
Reduce: Canvass Expenses [Administration]	-800	0.0
Reduce: Local Conference Related Education, Tuition, and Training [Administration]	-6,000	0.0
Reduce: Other Education, Tuition, and Training [Administration]	-14,380	0.0
Reduce: Sample Ballot Printing [Administration]	-30,210	0.0
Reduce: Sample Ballot Postage (Other - Mail) [Administration]	-30,400	0.0
Reduce: Electronic Pollbook Computer Equipment Repairs/Maintenance [Election Operations]	-63,340	0.0
Reduce: Part-Time Temporary Election Aides [Election Operations]	-72,070	0.0
Reduce: Election Overtime [Election Operations]	-182,490	0.0
Reduce: Temporary Office Clerical [Voter Registration Services]	-296,250	0.0
Other Adjustments (with no service impacts)		
Increase Cost: Annualization of FY11 Personnel Costs	33,670	0.0
Increase Cost: Restore Personnel Costs - Furloughs	33,670	1.8
Increase Cost: Printing and Mail Adjustment	14,550	0.0
Increase Cost: Motor Pool Rate Adjustment	1,690	0.0
Increase Cost: Help Desk - Desk Side Support	800	0.0
Decrease Cost: Outside Mail Services to the State Board of Elections - Ballot Mailing Expenses [Voter Registration Services]	-500	0.0
Decrease Cost: Operating Expenses Directly Related to Election Day and Canvasses [Administration]	-3,010	0.0
Decrease Cost: Short Term Furniture Rentals - Provides Tables and Chairs for Privately Owned Polling Places [Election Operations]	-5,000	0.0

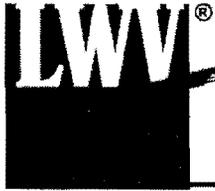
	Expenditures	WYs
Decrease Cost: Verizon Point to Point T1 Replacement	-5,450	0.0
Decrease Cost: Metropolitan Area Travel for Voter Outreach [Election Operations]	-9,880	0.0
Decrease Cost: Polling Place Supplies [Election Operations]	-22,670	0.0
Decrease Cost: Retirement Adjustment	-28,870	0.0
Decrease Cost: Building or Space Rental or Leases (Polling Place Rental) [Election Operations]	-33,000	0.0
Decrease Cost: Annualization of FY11 Operating Expenses [Administration]	-33,670	0.0
Decrease Cost: Group Insurance Adjustment	-35,360	0.0
Decrease Cost: Maintenance Cost - Statewide Election Management System (MDVoters) [Voter Registration Services]	-39,080	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Cycle Changes - Legal Services and Advertising [Administration]	-47,000	0.0
Decrease Cost: Sample Ballot Printing Contract [Administration]	-52,500	0.0
Decrease Cost: Printing [Election Operations]	-74,200	0.0
Decrease Cost: Sample Ballot Postage [Administration]	-80,000	0.0
Decrease Cost: Early Voting Operations [Election Operations]	-122,220	0.0
Decrease Cost: Payments for the Touchscreen Voting Machines [Election Operations]	-262,710	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Cycle Overtime [Election Operations]	-340,760	0.0
Decrease Cost: Election Judge Stipends Due to One FY12 County-wide Election [Election Operations]	-606,480	0.0
Decrease Cost: Temporary Clerical Services [Voter Registration Services]	-666,600	-5.4
FY12 RECOMMENDED:	4,891,160	40.3

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Program Name	FY11 Approved		FY12 Recommended	
	Expenditures	WYs	Expenditures	WYs
Voter Registration Services	1,786,880	17.5	1,156,140	14.5
Election Operations	4,811,440	19.4	2,743,750	18.8
Administration	1,373,360	7.0	991,270	7.0
Total	7,971,680	43.9	4,891,160	40.3

FUTURE FISCAL IMPACTS

Title	CE REC.			(\$000's)		
	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
This table is intended to present significant future fiscal impacts of the department's programs.						
COUNTY GENERAL FUND						
Expenditures						
FY12 Recommended	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891
No inflation or compensation change is included in outyear projections.						
Motor Pool Rate Adjustment	0	3	3	3	3	3
Subtotal Expenditures	4,891	4,894	4,894	4,894	4,894	4,894



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.

Written Testimony on Montgomery County FY 2012 Budget
April 7, 2011

Thank you for the opportunity to present our response to the proposed FY 2012 operating budget. As you know, the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD studies and takes positions on a wide variety of government issues. Our remarks today are based on local studies which the League has performed in past years.

Before our specific comments, we would like to point out that we recognize the extremely difficult economic conditions that you and the County Executive have been facing in the recent past and recognize that we cannot continue with "business as usual." We also recognize that uncertainties about both state and federal budgets contribute to the difficulties of preparing the county budget. We do have, however, concerns about proposed budgets for several specific programs.

Housing

We support the increase in the operating budget for the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the goal of affordable housing in an inclusive community as well as the dedicated funding provided by the Montgomery Housing Initiative and the Affordable Housing Acquisition and Preservation CIP project. These will provide for the acquisition and preservation of affordable housing units, housing rehabilitation, rental assistance programs, the creation and preservation of special needs housing and the creation of mixed-income housing. We also support funding of the Housing First Initiative and the Single-Family Housing program which ensures that moderately priced dwelling units are approved and monitored for resale control.

Board of Elections

We commend the Board of Elections for successfully implementing early voting in 2010 with the lowest costs/voter of any county in the state and a wait time indicator for all the early voting sites on its website. We also note that the election judge module created with the Department of Technology Services is superior to the one provided by the State for tracking all aspects of election judge management, from recruitment through payment, as evidenced by the interest of other counties in acquiring copies for their use (which may provide additional income.)

The Board of Elections has adhered to the guidelines provided by the Executive for reducing expenses. Beyond the expected reduction from FY 2011 because there is only one regularly scheduled election anticipated, instead of two, there also has been the requested additional 15% reduction, which not only hits temporary clerical services (over 1/3 reduction from the one election budget) and election overtime (over 1/2 reduction), but also sample ballot printing and postage and procurement of additional electronic poll books. The FY12 budget is just under \$4.9 million, when the comparable FY08 budget (the last presidential primary year) was about \$5.8 million. We also note that the county has had about a 6% growth in registered voters annually, while the budgets are being reduced.

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The Board of Elections has demonstrated its willingness to reduce its personnel costs, both in overtime and in temporary personnel, despite increasing numbers of registered voters, the real possibility of managing more early voting sites (pending in the General Assembly) and conducting intense review and adjustment of nearly 250 precincts in a short time frame to match the new boundaries of Congressional, Legislative and Councilmanic districts. If the Board has to live with this reduced staffing level, from an already small but dedicated staff, we must support them by lowering the expectations of candidates, elected officials and citizens. It will be very hard, if not impossible, for the Board to maintain its current goal of processing registration and election ballot requests within 48 hours of receipt. Also, the accurate processing of absentee ballots (both the highest number in the State and the largest percentage of the more labor intensive electronic ballots) must be the higher goal, rather than the speed with which they are reported.

Health Services

The County Executive's Recommended FY12 Operating Budget reflects a commitment to protect the programs and services that hold together the safety net for the most vulnerable residents in the county. In light of the expanding needs and reduced resources, it is a daunting challenge. We nonetheless question budget decisions in the following:

Public Health Services - Montgomery Cares continues to be an important primary care home to many uninsured. The proposed annual fee will partially offset the budget reduction but it is not clear to us how health care for homeless people will be affected by the significant reduction to the program or if the reduction to the Language Line will reduce access to some residents.

We consider that preventive care and education is important for maintaining good health and reducing costs. We question:

The decrease in Reproductive Health Family Planning Operating expenses
The elimination of the Teen Pregnancy Grant
The cost decrease of HIV counseling and testing grant
The elimination of two full time Community Services Aide positions
Elimination of a full time Community Health Nurse position
Elimination of a full time School Based Health Center Nurse Manager position

Aging and Disability Services - Home care services enable many seniors to remain in their homes rather than being institutionalized. Cuts in home based services may compromise a client's well-being and increase the cost of care. The reductions to Senior Korean Chore Services to 20 clients, Case Management Intervention services to 25 clients and In Home Care Services to eight new clients are of concern.

Requests for Respite Care have increased dramatically (from 428 requests in 2009 to 1,500 projected in 2011 and 2012) for frail seniors, adults and children with disabilities, and children with serious behavioral problems. These services help caregivers who care for their relatives but need occasional breaks. Respite services funding needs to be increased to keep up with the need.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services - We are gratified that the budget for 24-hour Crisis Center has remained intact. However, abolition of a part-time therapist II position and a full-time supervisory therapist position are of concern in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinic.