

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL RE PROPOSED
AMBULANCE TRANSPORT REIMBURSEMENT
GREATER OLNEY CIVIC ASSOCIATION
BY **ARNOLD B.GORDON,**
MAY 8, 2012_

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Council:

The County Executive has again introduced the controversial ambulance fee, and for good and sound reasons. The Greater Olney civic Association (GOCA) believes, as it did in 2008, that this matter should not be the subject of political demagoguery. The facts are straight forward:

- This fee is found money; No taxpayer in our county will pay for this fee whether insured or not;
- These fees are already calculated into all health insurance contracts in this general area;
- We are paying for this in our health insurance regardless of the vote;
- To refuse this fee is to leave \$18 million in FY 2014 and up to \$110,000,000 (94 million after administrative costs) over the next 6 years on the table;
- If you have a heart attack on 270 north of the Frederick line you pay a fee; South of the line no matter where you come from you don't pay a fee, ergo, a Frederick resident gets a service from this county for free and a Montgomery resident in Frederick has to pay;
- **Any co-pay or deductible on this will NOT be collected by the county from a county resident.**

Now it has been argued by, among others, the Civic Federation, that there is language in the bill that makes this an obligation of the service recipient. This simply is not so since the language of the bill clearly states that "Tax revenues received by the County must be treated as payment, on behalf of County residents, of the balance of each resident's portion of the emergency medical transport reimbursement charge that is not covered by the resident's insurance." If this was not clear enough Amendment 3 to the bill as sent to you by the County Executive in a memo of May 7th, clarifies that issue. **No county resident will pay for the emergency transport.**

It has also been argued that an amount equal to the portion of the fee not covered by insurance reimbursements must be transferred from the General Fund to the to the Fire and Rescue (FRS) budget; therefore the program will not generate added revenue to pay other Bills; and, instead would decrease funds for other needed programs and services. This too is false. 100 percent of this is dedicated funding for FRS and it supplements existing FRS spending to fund critically needed apparatus, staffing, and training needs. Without the \$18 million, the County would need to shift money from other critical (non-fire) programs which will be made very difficult in light of the recent shift of costs from the State to the County, which I remind you will cost us at least \$400 million over next ten years (and probably a Good deal more). This charge this would offset \$180 million plus of that cost shift. Further the amendments just transmitted to you make that abundantly clear as well.

It has also been argued that our health insurance rates will rise. There is zero evidence of any increase in insurance rates and that's because the costs of emergency services are already included in the premiums charged by insurers and already paid by county residents. Those premiums are already determined regionally or nationally and all other jurisdictions in our area already charge for the service. Remember that emergency transport services are a mere 1/10th of health care insurance costs. The county's actuaries calculate that there will be no difference in rates that result.

The only possible opposition to this are the county's Fire Volunteer associations, who, without a factual basis for such a belief, posit that they will collect less money for their contributions. That

has not proven true in any of the surrounding jurisdictions. These jurisdictions have viable fire volunteer associations that enjoy good financial health.

And here's the kicker: If this is such a bad idea, where are the stories, where is the adverse data, why aren't jurisdictions flocking to get rid of it. Why are other volunteers in jurisdictions that have it SUPPORTING it?

These facts are indisputable. Lets not pander to those who would frighten our taxpayers into believing this is an additional exaction. It just plain isn't.

The fee has not deterred anyone from calling an ambulance in any of the surrounding jurisdictions and if the politicians who pander on this will help edify their constituents properly, it will not deter anyone from calling an ambulance here as well. This should not be made into a hot political issue. We should approach this objectively and within the bounds of proper reasoning. This money is needed and some county service will be lost or reduced, or additional tax will be collected, if we don't collect the money that is already available to us.

As to the fact of the previous referendum results on this issue: The fiscal facts have changed drastically and **you are paid not only to follow the public's transitory will but to lead when good sense dictates.**

Thank you for your consideration.

GREATER OLNEY CIVIC ASSOCIATION by

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