



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

**Testimony to County Council on Expedited Bill 17-12, Fire and Rescue Service
Emergency Medical Services – Reimbursement
May 8, 2012**

I am Barbara Hankins Co-President of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County.

Leagues of Women Voters are able to take action on governmental issues only after its members have studied and come to agreement. Eighteen months ago, League members completed such a study and concluded that an emergency medical transport fee with certain features would be one way to increase the revenues of the county at this time of fiscal restraint. The conditions which we would attach to such a fee include an extensive public education program; provisions for tracking and evaluating the program; a clear description of the fee structure and distribution of monies; care and transport without regard to income or insurance; and waivers for those unable to pay fees. Some of our conditions are met in Expedited Bill 17-12 but, as the last time this issue was raised, others should be fleshed out in the regulations implementing the bill.

The concept of such a transport fee is not unique to Montgomery County. It is estimated that approximately 75% of jurisdictions nationwide already charge fees. Of Maryland's twenty four counties, only five including Montgomery, do not have transport fees of one kind or another. Similarly, the District of Columbia and many counties in Northern Virginia also collect such fees. Many of the departments who charge for ambulance transport have, as does Montgomery County, significant numbers of volunteer firemen.

We do not believe that, given extensive educational programs, citizens will be deterred from calling for ambulance services nor do we believe that there will be significant increases in health insurance premiums if this bill passes. Most of our senior citizens are covered by Medicare for which rates are set nationally. Many low income residents are covered by Medicaid which is paid by the state and federal governments. The transfer of funds from the general fund to the fire fund will cover the costs of the uninsured allowing us to meet federal requirements while still only directly charging fees for insured individuals.

We recognize, however, that in your consideration of this legislation, you will be evaluating the likelihood of the bill's ability to survive another petition drive and referendum. If you conclude that it has a reasonable chance of doing so, and enact it, we will work actively with other non-governmental supporters to educate the voters about its provisions, so that they can cast informed votes.