Emergency Medical Services Reimbursement Legislation

BILL 17-12E

Testimony of Fire Chief Richard Bowers

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

Public Hearing

May 8, 2012

Good evening. I am Fire Chief Richard Bowers and I am here on behalf of County Executive Leggett to speak in support of Bill 17-12E. I have served the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service for over 34 years. I am here before you now as the Fire Chief one of the Nation's most progressive combination fire and rescue system that is at yet another critical point in these challenging times.

The proposed legislation, Bill 17-12E, is a viable solution to the resource challenges presented to me as the Fire Chief. Bill 17-12E is different than previous EMS Reimbursement legislation. Bill 17-12E revised provides revenue and will support the fire and rescue service into the future. The EMS Reimbursement legislation is not a tax or a fee, and no County resident will ever receive a bill for any EMS transport by fire and rescue.

Montgomery County is growing exponentially and with that comes a greater need for response and infrastructure resources. I am charged with being a good steward of the recently procured fire apparatus valued at $32 million. The Apparatus Management Plan which Council endorsed in 2004 is currently without funding. The EMST Insurance Reimbursement can provide that funding through a planned, strategic approach, preventing MCFRS from having to come back to the citizens again in 10 years to replace an entire fleet once again.

Right now, we have limited options. First, which is not an option in my opinion, is to ignore our financial challenges and hope they go away. Second, we can raise taxes to provide the financial resources needed. This will place a financial burden on all residents of Montgomery County whether they have the means to pay or not. Lastly, we can implement the EMS Reimbursement legislation. There will be no financial impact on residents of Montgomery County, and it will produce the needed financial resources for us to meet the challenges of our fire and rescue service. This is money that the insurance companies have already allocated for this service which the County has chosen not to collect.

It is important to understand that County residents will be responsible for the emergency service only to the extent of insurance coverage. Insured County residents will not be responsible for co-pays or deductibles. Uninsured County residents will not pay anything. No County resident will pay, period.

Many of our surrounding jurisdictions have already implemented an EMS Reimbursement program, including Fairfax, Arlington, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, Prince William and Frederick counties, the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Baltimore, and the District of Columbia. Each of these jurisdictions has collected millions of dollars in revenues with their EMS Reimbursement programs. There have been no adverse impacts on the residents of these counties and cities and there has been no reduction in 911 calls either.

The financial situation and landscape has significantly changed over the last two years. Seven operational emergency response units in Fire and Rescue have been de-staffed and no longer respond to emergency incidents. The EMS Reimbursement legislation will enable fire and rescue to restore these units to service!

There can be no doubt that the burden of additional financial stresses associated with either the doomsday budget or the financial shift of the teacher pensions and the MOE are coming and will have a negative impact on the County and our residents in the next decade and beyond.

The EMS Reimbursement Bill 17-12 does not place a fee or tax on any County resident and no County resident will ever get a bill. Bill 17-12 does enable fire and rescue to collect millions of dollars from the insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid to support the fire and rescue service.

I urge the County Council to pass Bill 17-12E.