



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

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COUNCIL APPROVES CHANGES TO COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

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The Montgomery County Council today unanimously approved legislation to create a more unified command and control structure for the County Fire & Rescue Services, enhancing the role of volunteers within the system while strengthening the Service's ability to cope with emergencies in the post-9/11 world.

The measure was authored by Councilmember Michael Knapp and co-sponsored by Councilmembers George Leventhal and Michael Subin.

"Montgomery County residents will be better protected by their Fire and Rescue Services thanks to the measure we passed today," said Councilmember Knapp, lead Councilmember for Fire & Rescue issues and chair of the Council's Homeland Security Committee. "We needed clearer lines of authority and more accountability for changing times. With this bill, that's exactly what we got."

"We reached this balanced approach through the involvement and input of hundreds of County residents and volunteer and career firefighters over the past six months.

"Starting today, we build on the independence and the best efforts of our local volunteer fire departments and the incredible dedication of all our Fire & Rescue personnel, while updating and strengthening our lines of command and control to deal with 21st century challenges."

The legislation establishes for the first time the position of uniformed County Fire Chief who would have the authority to administer, direct, and originate Fire & Rescue operations.

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It retains the seven-member Fire & Rescue Commission – composed of career and volunteer representatives and public members -- nominated by the County Executive and confirmed by the Council. That commission would review and approve or disapprove Service policies and regulations within 60 days.

Other provisions include:

- Enhancement of the position of the Chief of the Division of Volunteer Services to have a clear role in the administration, recruitment, retention, and promotion of volunteer personnel and facilities.
- Elimination of the position of Fire Administrator.
- Establishment of a representative body of local fire and rescue departments, solidifying a volunteer role in decision making and facilitating direct negotiations between the local departments and the new Chief on volunteer issues.
- Provision of additional incentives for volunteers, including improvement of the “Length of Service Awards Program,” an increase in the death benefit, use of County recreational facilities at reduced cost, and greater flexibility of tuition assistance-based programs.
- Fully-bought and owned volunteer apparatus will not be transferred on a non-emergency basis without prior approval from the owning local fire and rescue department.

The legislation will take effect on January 1, 2005.

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