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Wednesday, September 11, 2013

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## Elrich committed to propose Montgomery wage bill, even if he is alone

*Measure would raise county minimum to \$12 an hour*

By **Kate S. Alexander** Staff Writer

With or without co-sponsors, one Montgomery County councilman says he will introduce a bill to nearly double the county's minimum wage.

Seeking to close the gap between the county's high cost of living and actual wages, Councilman Marc B. Elrich is drafting legislation that increases the county minimum wage from the federally mandated \$7.25 per hour to \$12 per hour.

"Everybody knows you can't live on minimum wage," he said. "But everybody knows that \$12 an hour isn't really a living wage either. So I'm trying to narrow the gap."

Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park said he plans to introduce the bill Sept. 24.

Elrich announced his bill two weeks ago and had planned to introduce it this week. His goal was to let the council tweak the legislation as it moved through the process, he said.

But in his discussions with the business community and colleagues, he decided he could address their concerns before he introduced the bill.

He included a provision to phase in the increase over several years and language that keeps the bill in line with existing exclusions to the federal minimum wage.

"I'm hoping that some of the changes will get me some co-sponsors," he said.

As of Monday, a day before Elrich was going to introduce his bill, he had no co-sponsors.

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With or without co-sponsors, however, he said he will bring his bill before the council to start discussion on raising wages.

Across the state and nation, lawmakers are pushing to raise minimum wages. A bill by former Sen. Robert Garagiola (D-Dist. 15) of Germantown to raise Maryland's minimum wage to \$10 an hour died in committee in the 2013 state legislative session.

But the effort is likely to continue in 2014.

Raise Maryland, a single-issue campaign focused on increasing Maryland's minimum wage, plans to push for a bill next session that raises the wage to \$10.10 per hour.

Matt Hanson, campaign coordinator, said the bill is essentially the same as the \$10 wage introduced last

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session, adjusted for inflation.

Increasing Maryland's minimum wage has drawn support from politicians including Rep. John Delaney (D-Dist. 6) of

Potomac and Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler, who is pursuing the Democratic nomination for governor.

But \$10 an hour does not go as far in Montgomery County as it does in some of the state's rural regions, Elrich said.

According to the 2012 Maryland Self Sufficiency Standard by the Maryland Community Action Partnership, a single adult with no children needs to earn \$17.07 per hour to meet basic needs in Montgomery County, such as food, rent and clothing.

In a two-adult home with children, each adult must earn \$19.62 per hour and single parents need to earn even more, as much as \$36.90 per hour, to meet basic needs.

Montgomery spends a significant chunk of its money on health and human services to subsidize basic needs for its lower-income residents. For the current fiscal year, which started July 1, the county looks to spend more than \$253 million on health and human services.

"Everything we spend is basically a wage subsidy," Elrich said.

Between subsidies for housing, child care, food and health care, the county is paying with taxes what should be paid with wages, he said.

"You think you're overtaxed. The easiest way to reduce services is to start increasing the amount of pay people working local jobs make," he said. "I don't want a welfare state, but the cause is not people not working, the cause is the wages being paid."

On Monday, Council President Nancy Navarro's chief of staff, Adam Fogel, said Navarro (D-Dist. 4) of Silver Spring had not received a copy of Elrich's bill for introduction on Sept. 24. Typically, the council president meets with staff to set the agenda a week in advance.

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