***Ambulance Fees Back in Play***

By Kristen Milton

Less than eighteen months after Montgomery County residents voted against ambulance fees, the County Council is scheduled to take up the question again at the request of the county executive.

Executive Ike Leggett has proposed the “Emergency Medical Services Transport Reimbursement Act,” which would allow the county to receive payment from private insurance companies and federal government for ambulance service. The council’s public hearing will be at 7:30 p.m. on May 8 with action slated for May 15.

In a press release, Leggett said his proposal was due to recent budget changes by the state, including an anticipated shift in teacher pension costs to the county, and all funds raised would benefit the county’s Fire and Rescue Services. Without the reimbursement, Leggett said, there will be either higher taxes or reduced rescue services. Ambulance fees would generate an estimated $14 million to $17 million for the county.

“As a county resident—whether insured or uninsured—you would not, by law, pay a dime,” Leggett wrote. “You wouldn’t even receive a bill. The county would accept the reimbursement offered as payment in full and would waive all co-pays and deductibles.”

During the lead-up to the 2010 referendum, which followed a 5-4 council vote in support of ambulance fees, opponents said they feared some residents would be discouraged from calling for an ambulance in emergencies and others anticipated insurance companies would raise rates.

Similar laws are in place in neighboring jurisdictions, and the proposal has generated supportive editorials from the *Washington Post* and the *Gazette*.