



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

Testimony on County Budget to the Montgomery County Council April 23, 2015

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County -- along with its many public citizen education projects -- studies national, state, and local issues and -- through a consensus process -- develops positions on these issues on which it can then act. Many of the areas addressed by the county budget touch on areas we have studied.

In general, we believe that government should be adequately funded. This year we wish to stress the following points regarding specific budget areas -- including the Board of Elections, education, health and children services, housing, environmental programs, and transportation/land use.

Board of Elections

Council aim: The County Council, in its directives to the 2013-2015 Right to Vote Task Force and in its post-election interactions with the Board of Elections, conveyed its desire to **“make voting easy and accessible for every citizen,”** especially requesting shorter lines at early voting centers and precincts, and faster reporting of results.

Challenges of new processes: The April 2016 primary election will use a brand new paper-based voting system. To accomplish the Council’s goals, the Task Force -- as well as members and staff of the Board of Elections -- recognize that voters need extensive preparation on voting on this new equipment. A comprehensive outreach plan, encompassing a variety of communication channels for the diverse county populations and for developing training videos for outreach events, YouTube, and other social media, is much more extensive than prior communication campaigns: **yet the budget remains at \$20,000 even though staff plans anticipate a cost at \$90,000.**

The new voting system will require more responsibilities and more technical abilities by the election judges who supervise the efficient running of the new equipment and assist voters throughout the process, including the new step to scan the paper ballots. Despite these new tasks on totally new equipment -- along with the need to completely overhaul election judge training -- **there are no new funds for (1) additional judges, (2) an increase in the election judge stipends** (the same since 2006) **or (3) the overhaul of the training for our Montgomery judges.**

The methods for faster reporting of election results are still under consideration with the new equipment, but many of the changes anticipate the need for increased funding, e.g., for increased modem lines and/or satellite reporting locations. **Again, there are no increases for these items.**



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The most extensive omission in the proposed Board of Elections budget is **the removal of all payments to the State for voting machines** despite the known need for State-County sharing of the new equipment costs. If Montgomery voters are to have shorter lines throughout the whole voting process from check-in through ballot scanning, it is almost inevitable that we will need more than the one SBE-allotted scanner for each precinct and more voting and scanning units in each of our nine early voting centers. **None of these costs for purchase or leasing equipment is included in this budget.**

These are all known costs that are necessary for the smooth running of the 2016 elections to meet the Council's expectations. Despite Board submissions explaining these costs, this budget does not include them. Delaying them to a supplemental appropriation not only denies the Board the ability to program funds in the most efficient way but also adds additional staff time in several entities for preparation and review of the supplementary submissions -- adding even more inefficiencies to the budget and programming process.

The League strongly encourages the Council to include these funds now to allow the superior electoral process outcome we all desire and expect in Montgomery County.

Education

Since enrollment has increased in the Montgomery County Public Schools and many of the students have special needs, it would seem that more money needs to be added to the education budget rather than cuts being made. Please **restore the funds that were cut.**

Health Services and Children and Family Services

Commendations: We note that the proposed budget increases funding for Developmental Disability programs by \$1 million.

We also appreciate that during FY14, the Crisis Center provided behavioral assessment, referrals, and recommendations for follow-ups to 1,035 children and adolescents referred by Montgomery County Public Schools, a 97 percent increase over FY12 when 526 were served.

Need: As we noted last year, it is important to **increase support for Respite Services** to fill an important gap.

Housing

Commendations: We appreciate that the proposed budget provides \$43.9 million for affordable housing creation and preservation and adds \$7 million in funding for senior housing projects in Silver Spring and Glenmont.



Environmental Programs

The Natural Resources Committee of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County has spent a great deal of time in 2014-15 looking at the county's progress in implementing its Climate Protection Plan of 2009. We were therefore quite shocked to learn that DEP's recent update (March 2015) indicates that the county's efforts to date have been insufficient to stop the pattern of an increase in greenhouse gases.

The League strongly urges you to implement the proposal of Councilmember Berliner to increase DEP staffing by three specifically to concentrate on how we can better reduce the county's level of greenhouse gas emissions.

The League also has the following questions and commendations concerning the environment.

Questions:

- What is the **rationale for reducing Solid Waste fees** by 4 percent across-the-board for families and businesses? We question the wisdom of not requiring us to pay more fully for the handling of the wastes we all generate?
- Has any analysis been done yet of **any budgetary effect** (including employee time) of the recent Maryland Court of Special Appeals decision ruling against the Maryland Department of the Environment's appeal in the case brought by the Anacostia Riverkeeper challenging the Montgomery County MS4 permit?

Commendations: We appreciate the proposed increase in staffing needed basically to meet the challenges of the county's Climate Protection Plan, along with current state and county regulatory programs.

Transportation

Below are our questions and commendations as well as our remarks pointing out needs for county transportation and land use issues.

Questions:

- When considering the budget equation with time and dollars, is any weight given to **environmental impacts and long-term effects**?
- Is the **maximum amount of revenue from advertising** currently being achieved? Are there long-term plans?



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- Why are the parking fines down? Do the new parking meters that are accessed by cell phones make that much of a difference or are there other factors?
- Will better and more reliable transit phone apps soon be released?
- **Can our parking garages be made safer for pedestrians?** Some low-cost expenditures – such as painting pathways and encouraging slower speeds -- would be helpful.
- Are there plans for increased bike parking racks at Metro stations?

Commendations:

- Additional White Oak expenditures for more efficient planning
- Total transit expenditures and revenue are continuing to rise
- Increasing the number of Capital Bikeshare bike stations by 5 inside the beltway
- Removal of snow on the roads and the campaign for better removal on sidewalks and paths
- Increasing the Ride On service in several jurisdictions
- Installation of Transit Screens at government buildings

Needs:

- **Better coordination** of road projects with utilities and developers to improve efficiency of spending for maintenance and improvements.
- **Better signage coordination for locations** and combining some signs on one standing post. (Note: On roads, there are sometimes so many signs that one sign blocks another.) This pertains to SHA, Metro bus, Ride On, crosswalks, schools, etc.
- **More funding for pedestrian improvements** – sidewalk maintenance as well as new sidewalks, especially near bus stops and on heavily used pedestrian routes in more urban areas. This includes uneven surfaces, foliage removal, and problems caused by improper storm drainage.

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