

## **Federal health care legislation to cost Montgomery County millions**

Officials say expenses were not budgeted

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County officials say the new federal health care legislation will cost the county about \$2 million this fiscal year and will become more expensive by 2014, when all of the requirements are in place.

The bulk of the increased costs come from a requirement allowing children to stay on their parents' health insurance until they turn 26.

That requirement alone has cost the county government about \$520,000, said Wes Girling, benefits division manager for the Office of Human Resources.

About 350 children of county employees who otherwise would have been too old to qualify for their parents' health insurance coverage have signed on since the reform program was enacted this year, Girling said.

The effect of federal health care legislation on county government, the school system and related departments was discussed during a council committee meeting Monday.

For the school system, which has about double the number of the employees as the county government, the additional cost is expected to be about \$1.1 million.

"This is based on an assumption that 1,000 of the 3,000 eligible dependents will return to their parents' plans," Superintendent Jerry D. Weast wrote in a letter to school board members in September. "Costs will increase if more dependents return." The school system has about 22,026 employees.

In county government, Girling said, the added costs were not factored into this year's budget, because the federal health care legislation had not yet been enacted when the county budget was adopted in May.

However, the added costs this year are less than 1 percent of the county government's total health care costs, and he expects the money can be recovered somehow.

He said employees' health insurance rates will increase in 2011 for several reasons, including the increased cost of health care under the new federal law.