

Monday, March 15, 2010

## **Leggett unveils \$4.3 billion budget**

### **Fiscal 2011 spending plan lays off 232; county employees face 10 furlough days**

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

As many as 232 county employees could lose their jobs and most government employees will be forced to take 10 days of unpaid leave under Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) proposed fiscal 2011 budget.

The cost-cutting measures are included in his \$4.3 billion proposed operating budget, which he released Monday morning.

Leggett's plan includes no pay raises — either step increases or cost-of-living raises — for county employees.

The proposed furlough days will apply only to nonuniformed employees and exempts police officers, firefighters, correctional officers and others, Joseph Beach, director of the county's office of management and budget, said Monday.

Leggett told the County Council on Monday that his proposed budget included a "great deal of pain."

His proposed budget fills a projected \$762 million budget hole, but Leggett said even if his budget proposal is approved the county is facing a \$200 million shortfall in fiscal 2012.

Leggett's proposed fiscal 2011 budget assumes that the county will receive \$14.7 million from a controversial ambulance fee that the council rejected last year.

"I'm continually miffed as to why we have not passed that," he told the council.

However, Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said Leggett is not considering administrative costs involved in the ambulance fee and that the actual revenue generated from the fee would be less.

He called the fee "bad policy," and said it would likely cause people to think twice before calling 911.

The fee would be charged to residents who live outside of Montgomery County who use ambulance services, and Leggett has said the cost would be absorbed by insurance companies.

"I don't remember when insurance companies became charities," Andrews said. "They will recoup that cost one way or another. There is no free lunch here."

Other items included in Leggett's proposed budget include:

- Closing the Noyes Library for Young Children at least for fiscal 2011. Beach said he does not consider this a permanent closure and said officials want to study how to best utilize the library. "Every library has a children's section," he said.

- Reducing staffing in all of the county's regional service centers to three. They all have various levels of staffing now.

- Eliminating the controversial tuition assistance program for county employees.

- Taking \$100 million from the county's rainy day fund.

- Reductions in funding to the county's libraries.