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Montgomery County executive's fiscal impact statements need work, according to report

Governing body should consider its own budget office, councilman says

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

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Some of the information released by Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett's office about the cost of legislation lacks detail and clarity, according to a report released Tuesday by the county's Office of Legislative Oversight.

The report studied 200 of Leggett's fiscal impact statements, which are attached to bills and let the County Council know how much they will cost county taxpayers.

The executive's office must provide fiscal impact statements, but the requirement is not part of the County Code.

"It just doesn't say what has to be in it," Knapp said, referring to the requirement.

County spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield said Leggett (D) disagrees with OLO's findings.

"Our job is to send over professional work that accurately represents the realities of various proposals, and we do that," Lacefield said.

Council Vice President Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring said Tuesday's report was especially timely because the council and Leggett's office currently disagree over the cost of new provisions in employee contracts.

Leggett's office says giving county employees extra paid leave would cost the county nothing, but OLO reported the cost could be \$7 million.

In its report, OLO recommends that a requirement for fiscal impact statements be added to the County Code.

The current requirement to prepare fiscal impact statements for legislation is in the Montgomery County Plain Language Drafting Manual, a little-known, 25-year-old document with limited legal authority, the OLO report states.

OLO also recommends that the council adopt legislation that specifies the required content of the fiscal impact statements.

Councilman Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown, who led the effort to commission the OLO study, requested that legislation be drafted to require a standard for fiscal impact statements.

Councilman George Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park questioned whether the council should have more input in fiscal studies.

"Would it be better to get the fiscal impact statements from OLO or the legislative branch?" he asked Tuesday.

Lacefield did not directly address Leventhal's question, but said Leggett's office would "continue to do [its] job."

"I used to work for the council," Lacefield said. "Sometimes they would rather the information say something else."