

Montgomery council denies increased pay for paramedics

Knapp: County has problem hiring enough crew members

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County's paramedics will not get the pay raises they were expecting under an agreement reached with County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) in July.

The County Council voted 8-1 on Tuesday to reject the raises, saying they are unaffordable. Councilman Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown voted in favor of the extra pay.

Leggett's agreement would have given the county's 230 career paramedics pay raises of about \$1,000, at a cost of about \$200,000.

The proposed pay raises resulted from out-of-cycle collective bargaining that was initiated after the council indicated it would not fund employee pay raises in the current year.

If the council had approved the pay hikes for paramedics, they would have been the only county employees to receive an increase this year.

The raises were to take effect after council approval.

Fire and Rescue Chief Richard Bowers has said the pay raises were needed to recruit paramedics for at least 18 vacant positions.

Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg, who chairs the council's Public Safety Committee, said Tuesday that the committee favored a more targeted approach, such as offering bonuses to new recruits.

However, Knapp said the council's decision Tuesday to reject the extra pay aggravates the ability to hire more paramedics.

"The problem right now is the lack of resources" to do so, said Council President Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park.

Knapp said the county still will have to address how to hire enough paramedics to staff ambulances.

He said even offering one-time bonuses will not be enough incentive to recruit and retain paramedics, which has been a problem for at least eight years.

Knapp said once county paramedics received a one-time payment, they likely would leave for higher-paying jobs.