

Council considers scaling back union rights

Montgomery County's public employee unions turned out en masse Tuesday to protest three measures that would scale back collective bargaining.

The bills would limit collective bargaining for the Fraternal Order of Police to match that of the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization and the Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters, require the County Council to hold a public hearing on every collective bargaining agreement submitted, and create an arbitration panel to handle impasse arbitration.

Opponents of the bills were vocal, with MCGEO members wearing red clown noses and holding signs to show their opposition.

Proponents of the bills pointed to an inefficient bargaining process.

"Effects bargaining" -- disputes over actions within a manager's rights that could affect the union's contract -- "diminishes my ability to run this agency in the most efficient and effective manner," said Police Chief Tom Manger.

Opponents cited a range of arguments.

The bills "are not well thought out and contain serious flaws," and would "produce little or no savings in government," said John Sparks, president of the Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters.

The bills are scheduled for committee on Thursday. - Rachel Baye