

Montgomery looks to impose youth curfew

By: [Rachel Baye](#) | Examiner Staff Writer | 07/12/11 8:05 PM

The Montgomery County Council is weighing a year-round curfew on all youth under the age of 18 in an effort to clamp down on juvenile crime and gang activity.

The bill, proposed by County Executive Ike Leggett, would be the first curfew imposed in the county and would prohibit youths from being in any public place from midnight to 5 a.m. on weekend nights and from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Sunday through Thursday nights.

Leggett said the law is an effort to be proactive against youth crime, although overall crime is down in Montgomery County, dropping 7.5 percent in 2010.

Local curfews

District of Columbia

Age: Under 17

During the summer: Midnight every day.

During the school year: Sunday through Thursday 11 p.m.; Friday and Saturday midnight.

Prince George's County

Age: Under 17

Year round; Sunday through Thursday 11 p.m.; Friday and Saturday midnight.

Montgomery County proposed

Age: Under 18

Year round; Sunday through Thursday 11 p.m.; Friday and Saturday midnight.

Fairfax County

No curfew in place

"I don't want to wait until we have large incidents and problems and challenges," he said.

Both the District of Columbia and Prince George's County have instituted similar curfews in recent years, which Montgomery County officials blamed for teenagers pouring over the border at night.

Montgomery County has become "the easy place to go," said Councilman Marc Elrich, D-at large, who sits on the council's public safety committee.

Leggett called the large numbers of youth coming to Montgomery "unacceptable."

Assistant Police Chief Wayne German said the measure is intended to address an increase in gang activity.

Gang activity is one element of the crime county officials want to prevent, said Leggett, but "young people commit crimes of all magnitude."

The measure would fine parents who allow their children to violate the law, as well as business owners who allow youth to congregate in their business after curfew. Youth who violate the curfew could face community service requirements, fines or even incarceration, Leggett said.

"The question as to whether or not it's a felony or a misdemeanor ... we are still evaluating," he said, adding that the goal is to deter youth, rather than arrest them en masse.

The law allows a number of exceptions, permitting minors to be out past curfew if they are with a parent, at work, attending a school-related function or dealing with an emergency, among other things. Police must ask youth their reason for being out past curfew is before taking them into custody.

Councilman Phil Andrews, D-Gaithersburg/Rockville, the head of the council's public safety committee, said the law would present a "major change" for Montgomery County.

Dave Moss, National Youth Rights Association director of development and operations, said curfews are "misguided decisions driven out of fear" that don't prevent crime.

Moss pointed to New York, where there is no youth curfew but youth crime has decreased.

"We really need to know more than we know," Elrich said.

A public hearing is set for July 26, with the bill scheduled for committee Sept. 15. The council will vote on the bill after that.

If it passes, it would take effect immediately.

Natalie Plumb contributed to this report.