

# Overtime costs MontCo residents \$8.7 million extra

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The four Montgomery County departments that shell out the most in overtime pay cost taxpayers \$8.7 million in unbudgeted overtime costs last fiscal year.

But the understaffing that the heads of the Police Department, Fire and Rescue Services, the Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, and the Department of Transportation blame for the overtime is going to end up costing taxpayers even more if it's not addressed, the officials told members of the County Council Thursday.

Paying employees overtime can be cheaper than hiring new staff because it prevents the county from paying more in employee benefits, said Police Chief Tom Manger. But at a certain point, it becomes more expensive to shell out more overtime.

All four agency heads said they have reached that point.

"There's a balance there without question," said Fire Chief Richard Bowers. "We're way out of whack."

The departments slimmed down their rosters as a result of countywide budget cuts, and the cuts have affected performance, they said.

For example, understaffing in the Department of Transportation has caused some Ride On routes to be neglected, said Director Arthur Holmes.

In the police and fire departments, 911 call center staff are becoming burned out, said Bowers and Manger.

"It's so easy to sit here and say, 'We're just going to take these off the top,'" said Council President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring. "Somewhere down the line we're going to get less high quality service."

Budget cuts were not the only factor to blame for the excess in overtime payouts, though.

Manger pointed to court appearances, which account for nearly 40 percent of the police overtime budget. Because the state schedules the majority of the police court appearances, the county police department can't prevent that overtime cost, Manger said.

He urged the council to lobby state lawmakers to change the procedures, and Councilman Phil Andrews, D-Gaithersburg/Rockville and chairman of the council's public safety committee, promised to take up the issue.

The U.S. Open, which was held at Bethesda's Congressional Country Club in June, also cost the county extra overtime.

The four departments reported a total of \$780,538 in overtime costs as a result of the event, the majority of which was paid to police officers who provided security. None of the overtime spending was anticipated in the county's budget, officials told *The Washington Examiner* in August.

The U.S. Golf Association reimbursed the county \$69,295 for police services -- which cost county taxpayers \$617,223. The organization also gave the county two hospitality packages, one of which was valued at \$265,000, and agreed to pay for two pedestrian bridges, estimated to cost \$130,000.

Council members questioned whether the county's executive branch could have negotiated an arrangement that covered more of the county's costs.

"I don't think we got the best deal," Andrews said.