

## County proposes big hit on big box stores

By Christa Puccio, The Sentinel. Published on: Thursday, April 05, 2012

ROCKVILLE - The "Big Box" store may take a big hit if Hans Riemer has his way.

The Montgomery County Council proposed a bill (4-12) that would require big box stores to pay employees living wages and provide health insurance coverage if the store received county grants from the Economic Development Fund.

"What our bill does is it says that if a big box wants a subsidy from the county to come here, it has to provide living wages and health. Generally speaking, I don't think big boxes make for good economic development. I think they come anyway and they don't need to subsidize and that's kind of the bottom line," said Councilmember Hans Riemer, lead on Bill 4-12.

According to the bill, it is an act to "(1) require payment of certain wages and benefits by an employer operating a large retail store on property for which certain grants are received from the Economic Development Fund; (2) require payment of certain wages and benefits by an employer operating a large retail store located on property sold or leased by the County under an urban renewal plan; and (3) generally require the payment of certain wages and benefits by certain employers receiving direct or indirect financial assistance from the County."

"The big stores never ask for a subsidy," said Riemer. You have to keep in mind that there are probably hundreds of big boxes here and almost never ask for a subsidy. It won't affect them. It's only the ones that want a subsidy and there are very few want one. It doesn't affect anyone who's here. It just means if they want to come here, they have to do it with their own money. The county has subsidized big retail over the years, for example Westfield Mall. What this is trying to do is establish in the future that big boxes are not a priority for economic development."

"The bill only says if you want money from the county, then you must pay living wages."

Jim Humphrey, chair of the Planning and Land Use Committee of The Montgomery County Civic Federation, testified for the passing the bill. Five testified against the bill.