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Cecil County Citizens:

This past Monday morning, April 30th, I was disappointed to read the headline and article in the *Cecil Whig* that included pictures of the individual loss of two homes shown fully engulfed in fire. The point of the article was to cast a negative perspective on my Fiscal Year 2019 proposed budget that did not provide funding for the replacement of a specific fire equipment replacement request by the Water Witch Fire Company in Port Deposit. The intention is that the reader will connect those two fires with a lack of equipment due to lack of proposed funding. That does not make sense. Two elected officials cited in the article do not agree with my proposed action. That in itself is fine, and is why we have the two-part budget approval process outlined in the Cecil County Charter.

What the article does not include is the fact that I met with the Executive Board of the Fireman's Association on April 9th and went to the Fireman's Association meeting on April 16th to discuss the reasons behind my proposed budget allocation to items associated with fire fighters and fire equipment. I listened intently to the thoughts and perspectives offered by the Board and members of the fire companies. I reinforced my belief that when disaster strikes in Cecil County, the volunteers and equipment that come to the rescue are the backbone of emergency response and until you are the one in need of their services, do you realize their passion and their commitment to saving lives. Of course, I will continue to fund these associated expenses to a level that the fiscal resources will allow.

Listed below are the funding levels in next year's proposed budget that are associated with the Cecil County Volunteer Fire Companies. I believe that this funding effort is significant and a positive indication of my belief that this critical volunteer organization is an essential partner in providing a safe and secure environment in Cecil County. The total amount of support for the volunteer fire companies in FY2019 is \$4,431,263, which is an increase of 5.8% over FY2018. The budget supports the following:

1. Funding for the Volunteer Length of Service Award Program (VLOSAP) for the firefighters who have sacrificed their time and risked their lives to save others in the amount of \$996,000, which is an increase from last year in the amount of \$246,000. The increase in the FY2019 budget is the first step toward the establishment of the VLOSAP pension plan. Historically, the program has been funded on a pay-as-you-go basis, and no liability has previously been reflected on the financial statements. Funding the VLOSAP as a pension plan would allow the County to allocate funds to cover benefit payments for current retirees and future benefit payments for active volunteers. This change is fitting and proper, will ensure the financial sustainability of the program for future firefighter retirees, and will have a positive effect on the County's financial overall position.
2. An increase of \$2,950 in professional and related services to support the VLOSAP website and software license.

3. An increase of \$15,000 for medical supplies purchased by the County and given to the fire companies for their use.
4. The budget continues to support the maintenance contracts for bariatric stretchers and defibrillators.
5. The budget includes \$2,657,060 in allocation funding to all nine fire companies that is distributed based on real property assessments. The allocation budget is an increase of \$109,549 over the FY2018 budget.
6. The budget includes vehicle replacement funding for an ambulance at both Chesapeake City & Hacks Point Fire Companies.

My FY2019 Proposed Budget that I submitted to Council is the result of tough choices. The choices were made to lay the groundwork to secure the financial future of Cecil County. If the FY2019 Proposed Budget had unlimited revenue resources, it would look much different than it does today. One of my main campaign promises was that I would work with others to ensure that Cecil County Government used sound funding strategies to achieve a balanced budget approach -- something that has not been done in the past and, as a result, placed us frankly in fiscal jeopardy.

The County Council will continue the FY 2019 Budget hearing process next Tuesday, May 8th, 5:30 PM in the Elk Room at the Cecil County Administration Building, 200 Chesapeake Blvd., Elkton. One of the items on the agenda is public safety, which includes the Department of Emergency Services and the Volunteer Fire Companies. I encourage you to attend!

In the meantime, the members of my staff and I are doing our best to continue our efforts to move Cecil County forward. I appreciate the continued trust you have in me as your County Executive. You deserve nothing but our best effort.

Thank you for your support.



Dr. Alan J. McCarthy
County Executive