

**Sayers, Margery**

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**From:** Leif Powers <lep@leifpowers.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 11, 2020 9:45 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Testimony/comments relating to Legislative Public Hearing 18 May 2020, agenda item CR71-2020

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Hi County Council Staff,

Please find below my comments on referenced agenda item, fee and rate schedules, for line item (7) Marriage license fee charge for funding of domestic violence programs;

I advise against increasing the marriage license fee in this way; instead I advise to fund the spouse shelters and domestic violence programs through general taxation (as is my reading of the family law section 2-404, this is optional for the county to raise this fee). This advice is based on three major points:

- Raising revenue through miscellaneous fees complicates government for officials and citizens alike, making it unmanageable. (the most important)
  
- Marriage probably is associated with a decrease in domestic violence vs. alternative relationship arrangements. The point of technique is that sometimes you might wish to tax something (e.g. cigarettes, mining, road tolls) as a means to discourage or de-incentivize certain behaviors. However, because marriage (you know any type of claim like this is fraught with confounders) appears, by a quick web search of various small or regional studies, to be associated with improved outcomes/reduced frequency related to domestic violence, taxing it is the reverse of what you would want, assuming the fee were of a sufficient size even to discourage this behavior, which it is not except for the dirt poorest, who, statistically, aren't getting married, anyway.
  
- If the intention is to redistribute income, the effect is slight, and not clear to my casual observation that it even has an effect, or the desired effect. Although local allocation of income tax is flat (suggesting progressivity, if you consider that poor people aren't as likely to civilly marry), we still have ~44% of the budget funded out of property tax, so it is not clear that if you merely increased income and/or property taxation in equal proportion according to spending, you would get a materially different income distribution result. In other words, because the general taxation is wealth-progressive and hence proxy for income-progressive (either one could apply here), there is no point to making a special fee to redistribute income when keeping the same structure and proportions of general taxation (but ever so slightly increasing the rates) would achieve the similar distribution.

(District 4 Deb Jung)

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Leif Powers  
11301 Little Patuxent Pkwy Apt 127  
Columbia, MD 21044  
816-885-1287