



COMMISSION ON AGING

Commission on Aging Priorities HHS Committee of the Montgomery County Council October 11, 2012

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging thanks the County Council for the current year FY13 budget that included restoration of funding in several areas important to older adults. After several years of program reductions these funds represent a downpayment on what is needed to make Montgomery County a Community for a Lifetime. For FY14, we need to build on that downpayment and begin implementing the Senior Agenda this Commission has outlined.

The County's demographic shift to older adults is dramatic and can be seen in all of our diverse ethnic groups. Today there are more than 120,000 County residents age 60 years and older. By 2020, one out of every four residents will be 60 years or older. Moreover, Montgomery County has the largest share of Hispanic and Asian elderly in the State, and other diverse groups of seniors who reside in our County.

The Commission on Aging advises County Government and advocates for older adults to age successfully in Montgomery County. The Commission's Senior Agenda outlines what the County must address to become a Community for a Lifetime, a place for older adults to live safe, healthy and vital lives. We are pleased that the County Council will soon consider a resolution on that Senior Agenda.

The Commission has identified critical housing, transportation, and mental health priorities for older adults who are vulnerable and at-risk and, also for those of low and middle-income whose continued independence relies on these services.

Among many residents who have been seriously impacted by the recession are older workers laid off and still looking for jobs, those less active or infirm older adults who need services at home, and those who need transportation services to leave their home. Many older residents cannot use public transportation to doctors get to dentists, community centers or stores.

The County should consider the overall needs of older adults and the cumulative effect of programs when changes are made. Just as we plan for and build roads, highways and basic infrastructure of communities, we need to plan for and build the infrastructure to make Montgomery County a community for a lifetime.

Aging in Place: Housing and Services: Finding affordable housing for older adults is reaching crisis levels. The Commission has examined housing issues during two summers of study. We recommend that the County **restore funding to the Housing Initiative Fund to the 2009 level and, thereby, enable increased funding for new construction and rehabilitation of older buildings for safe and affordable housing for seniors.** This housing fund also includes resources for homeless housing, an HHS program and a population that includes an increasing number of older adults.

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The Commission on Aging has worked to respond to the growing desire of County residents to age in place in their homes or communities. The difficulty of some tasks, such as home maintenance and driving, has led to “Villages” where neighbors help one another. If we look ahead, more planning is needed to stimulate affordable in-home services, beyond what volunteers can do. To the extent that we can develop communities where people can age with supportive services to meet their needs, we can reduce the high costs of institutionalization and health care. We recommend the County **establish a Coordinator to provide technical and planning assistance** to “Villages” especially in developing new Villages in areas of middle/low income residents.

Transportation: Transportation is the uppermost concern of older residents in the County, especially those aging in place. The Commission urges the **development of a transportation plan for seniors that coordinates all public and private transportation options. A plan with multiple options should include funding for escorted transportation and development of a new ride share service** to fill a gap that exists.

To build the infrastructure for aging, the FY 14 budget should include expanded funding to connect transportation to community centers for activities important for mental and physical health. This can be done while the County develops a more comprehensive transportation plan.

Health - Social isolation, a lack of social connectedness, can occur when someone does not speak English, or is frail, depressed or physically challenged; cannot get transportation or feels uneasy about going outside a neighborhood to community centers. More than 25 percent of County seniors age 65 and older, the majority of whom are women, live alone.

Services that promote social connectedness and fitness activities are key to overall health and especially mental health. Clearly recreation and senior centers provide important services but to do so, they need to be staffed and maintained. **We ask that funding be restored for senior center maintenance, staffing and transportation services.**

An estimated 18 percent of seniors have a limitation in performing activities of daily living. Critical County funded health/mental health services for our increasing population of older, vulnerable and most needy seniors need to be increased. These include **Senior Outreach Services** for mental health and **respite care** for caregivers. Respite care, where a frail senior lives with a caregiver, received harsh funding cuts in Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011, and the budget for the Senior Outreach Mental Health contract has been flat for years, despite unprecedented growth of our older population. The County also should advocate strongly to the State to reduce the expanding waiting list that now includes 1,800 County’s most needy residents waiting for the State/Federal Older Adult Waiver Program. This has significant human cost but also economic cost because the waiver enables less costly nursing care services for people aging in their homes than institutional care. Advocacy is also needed to fund **case management** for the increasing Older Adult Waiver participants (at-home nursing care).

Finally, we ask the County to restore funds for senior information and communication. Funding is needed to print resource publications, in multiple languages, on transportation and health and social services, as little or no printed information on County services is readily available to the public. While this may change over time, those over the age of 75 now rely on and need printed information.

Conclusion: Older adults are a large and rapidly growing segment of the County’s population. We urge the County Council to embrace the necessary steps to make Montgomery County a Community for a Lifetime.