



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION ON HEALTH

Thursday, March 21, 2024

### **This meeting had a quorum.**

The Commission on Health for Montgomery County, Maryland convened in person and via Zoom on Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2024 for their annual retreat.

#### **Present**

Susan Emery (chair), Beth Barrows, Marcela Campoli, Donna Cawley, Cimo Chen, Rashida Dokes, Adam Finkelstein, Tatjana Meerman, Milan Patel, Venchele Saint Dic, Betty Smith, Crystal DeVance- Wilson, Laurel Fain, Dr. Davis (non-voting member), Kristin Cummings (on behalf of Tara Clemons Johnson), Arthur Summerville

#### **Absent**

Brent Berger, Gabriela Lemus, Cesar Perez, Joseph Nichols

#### **DHHS Staff**

Felicia Hugee, Meghan Sontag

#### **Guest**

Councilmember Albornoz, Beth Shuman

#### **General Business**

- A. Welcome
  - a. The meeting commenced with a welcome from Susan Emery at 5:30 with Call to order.
- B. Approval of February minutes. February Minutes were reviewed and approved.
  - a. Motion to approve February 15<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. Minutes unanimously approved.

#### **Presentations**

##### **1. Councilmember Gabe Albornoz**

At-large Councilman since November 2018 & Current Chair of the Health & Human Services Committee.

- a. In these challenging times, we are presented with tremendous opportunities for growth and progress. As the Chair of the HHS Commission, I have the privilege of viewing our county's landscape from a 360-degree perspective, allowing me to understand the interconnectedness of various issues and initiatives.
- b. Council members, as duly elected officials, play a crucial role in shaping the legislative landscape of our county. With an increased number of members, consisting of 7 elected



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representatives from specific districts and 4 elected at large, we bear significant responsibility, particularly regarding the budget. Following the release of the MoCo Budget by the County Executive on March 14, we embark on a comprehensive four-month analysis of each item included in the budget. I am honored to serve on both the HHS and Arts budget committees, where we meticulously examine budget allocations to ensure they align with our community's needs and priorities.

- c. In addition to budget oversight, council members have the authority to pass laws at the local level, addressing issues that directly impact our constituents. Land use is another critical aspect of our responsibilities, where we work closely with the planning board to affirm recommendations that promote equitable access to healthy activities and amenities for all residents.
- d. Furthermore, constituent services are at the heart of our work. We are committed to being responsive and accessible to the needs and concerns of the people we represent, advocating on their behalf to address pressing issues and improve quality of life across our county.
- e. Overall, as council members, we are dedicated to serving our community with integrity, diligence, and a commitment to fostering positive change. Current Public Health Concerns and Opportunities:
- f. **Addressing Youth Struggles:** Across the country, youth face a triple threat of violence, substance abuse, and mental health challenges. Substance abuse, often linked to bullying and abuse within schools like MCPS, remains a significant concern. Additionally, incidents of violence and carjackings involving youth from the school system are alarming. We are actively providing direct support to youth affected by these issues, tackling them comprehensively and urgently.
- g. **Reducing Emergency Department Waiting Times:** The extended waiting times in our emergency departments, currently the longest in Maryland, pose a critical challenge. This situation is exacerbated by instances of Code Blue, where all emergency beds are occupied, including by youth experiencing mental health crises. These prolonged wait times not only impact patient care but also contribute to heightened tension and potentially violent events in emergency rooms.
- h. **Ending Childhood Hunger:** We commend the positive recommendation on addressing childhood hunger in MoCo through the Office of Food Resilience. Over the past two years, this program has made significant investments in combating hunger, marking a record number of initiatives aimed at ensuring food security for children in our community.
- i. **Improving Dental Services:** Efforts are underway to enhance and expand dental care infrastructure in MoCo. Access to quality dental services is crucial for overall health and well-being, and we are committed to making strides in this area to better serve our community.
- j. **Increasing Reimbursement Ratio:** There is a pressing need to increase the reimbursement ratio for Montgomery care services. This adjustment is long overdue



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and essential for ensuring equitable access to vital healthcare services for all residents of our county.

- k. **Supporting Aging and Disability Communities:** The aging and disability community is rapidly growing, necessitating enhanced support and resources. We are actively collaborating with the Commission for People with Disabilities to address the unique needs of this demographic and ensure their inclusion and well-being within our community.
- l. Question/Answer
1. **Partnership with FQCHC through PCC Advocacy:** The County is fortunate to have excellent Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (FQCHC) in our county, supported by the Primary Care Coalition (PCC), which serves as a convening body advocating for these centers collectively. PCC holds biannual meetings where we receive testimonies from FQCHC organizations, allowing us to gain insights into their efforts to reduce public health disparities, particularly in minority communities. Additionally, we engage with health advocates to enhance our understanding of community needs and identify opportunities for improvement. Moving forward, we aim to strengthen collaboration with state stakeholders to address critical issues that extend beyond the county level, and we recognize the importance of connecting with federal stakeholders to amplify our impact.
2. **Montgomery Cares Reimbursement Recommendations:** The Council is committed to ensuring equitable access to healthcare services, including mental health care, through initiatives such as Montgomery Cares. The current reimbursement recommendation of \$175, based on CMS benchmarks, reflects our dedication to supporting these vital community health resources.
3. **Improving Agricultural Reserves:** Recognizing the importance of food security, the Council is taking steps to improve collaboration with farmers in our agricultural reserves, which encompass one-third of the county's space. Recent efforts include addressing issues such as food waste due to reduced refrigeration capacity. By enhancing collaboration and infrastructure, we aim to optimize food distribution and reduce waste, ultimately benefiting our community's well-being.
4. **Funding Hubs and Promoting Collaboration:** We continue to fund community hubs strategically located, including those in neighboring PG County, recognizing the value of partnerships that extend beyond geographic borders. These hubs serve as vital resources for our residents, providing access to essential services and fostering community engagement.
5. **Prioritizing Mental Health in Budget Initiatives:** As we plan our budget, we maintain confidence in our commitment to supporting mental health initiatives, including those aimed at addressing the mental health crisis exacerbated by factors such as virtual learning challenges, truancy, and systemic racism. We recognize the urgent need to bolster infrastructure and support systems to meet the increasing demand for mental health services, particularly among communities disproportionately affected by these issues.
6. **Improving the implementation of Restorative Justice and Multi-Sectoral Support:** To address systemic issues such as truancy and racism, we advocate for the improvement on the implementation of restorative justice practices within educational institutions like MCPS. By fostering collaboration among multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, and law enforcement, we aim to provide comprehensive support to at-risk youth and address root causes contributing to mental health challenges. Restorative justice initiatives, along with community interventions targeting issues like gang violence, exemplify our commitment to creating safer, healthier communities for all residents.



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### 2. DHHS County Health Officer Dr. Davis

- a. In my tenure of one year and a quarter as a family physician, I've had the privilege of serving the community where I was born and raised, deeply rooted in Montgomery County. As a family physician, I've been entrusted with the care of individuals from birth to end of life, fostering strong connections with my patients and witnessing firsthand the importance of building healthier communities.
- b. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges, yet it has also underscored the critical need to prioritize and sustain the health infrastructure developed during this crisis for future global health challenges. Moving forward, it's imperative to ensure that the lessons learned, and the resources mobilized during the pandemic remain integral to our healthcare systems.
- c. Upon assuming my position, the emerging opioid crisis was already evident, and since then, we've seen a troubling escalation in overdose cases. To address this, we've focused on deploying resources like Narcan to combat overdoses and enhancing secondary prevention efforts by expanding inpatient facilities for youth struggling with substance abuse. However, the exorbitant cost of inpatient services remains a barrier, necessitating collaboration with state authorities to reopen closed facilities and explore cost-effective alternatives.
- d. Furthermore, tackling health disparities and promoting health equity are paramount objectives. Initiatives targeting issues such as disparities in black maternal health aim to reach thousands of individuals, reflecting our commitment to fostering inclusive and equitable healthcare services.
- e. In response to a Commissioner question: Despite Montgomery County's recognition as one of the healthiest counties nationally, significant challenges persist. Although there may not be specific concerns regarding immigrant youth from violent countries, the presence of income inequalities in the County underscores the persistence of challenges related to violence, often rooted in systemic issues such as poverty and local socio-economic disparities. While tensions may exist, they are often symptomatic of broader systemic issues rather than direct consequences of immigration. Effectively addressing these multifaceted challenges demands a collaborative, multi-pronged approach that tackles underlying socio-economic disparities and fosters community resilience.
- f. In addressing mental health crises, we acknowledge the shortage of staff and resources, emphasizing the importance of school-based programs and safe spaces for youth. However, gaps remain, and we must ensure that all necessary resources are available to support individuals in crisis, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- g. An advocacy opportunity lies in leveraging technology to enhance access to healthcare services, while updates to dental programs and initiatives like the Health for All bill aim to expand access to essential services like dental care and health insurance. By analyzing strategies to promote health insurance registration and leveraging existing community resources, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Montgomery Cares, we strive to address the diverse healthcare needs of our community comprehensively.

### New Business

#### A. Presentation of Submitted Priorities for FY26

- a. During this retreat, our intention is to select priorities for inclusion in the FY26 budget.



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- b. 12 potential priorities were presented
- c. Floor Open to Vote to select Top 3 priorities, and then some of the priorities were combined with others, in same or similar subject area
- d. Selected
  - a. Priority #1: Mental/Behavioral Health + substance use disorder.
  - b. Priority #2: DHHS Mobile Health Clinic (hire a clinic manager)
  - c. Priority #3: Babies born healthy program + supporting nursing moms.
- e. Discussion Requested: Milan. Motion initiated: Donna, Second: Rashida. All in favor motion passed.

### **ACTIONS**

**Motion to approve minutes.** A MOTION was made by Donna Cawley to approve the February 15<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Cimo Chen. The minutes were unanimously approved by all present Commissioners (11). Two Commissioners joined after this action.

**Motion to approve COH representative (Sue and Adam) testify during the Operating Budget Public Testimony.** A MOTION was made by Betty Smith to approve public testimony. The motion was seconded by Cimo Chen. Voted to approve with a total of 10 votes. 1 abstention.

**Motion to approve 3 New Priorities for FY26.** A MOTION was made by Donna Cawley to approve three new priorities for FY26, (1) Mental/Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorder, (2) DHHS Mobile Health Clinic Program Manager II and (3) Babies Born Healthy and Supporting Nursing Moms. The motion was seconded by Rashida Dokes. Unanimously approved.

**Motion to Adjourn the meeting.** A MOTION was made by Betty Smith to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Sue Emery. The meeting adjourned at 8pm.