



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Montgomery County Council
FY24 Operating Budget Priorities
Patricia Gallalee, Chair
April 11, 2023**

1) Transportation

- We recommend that the County prioritize pedestrian safety over all other MCDOT projects (such as selectively limiting the installation of bicycle lanes and floating bus stops). **Sidewalk installation should be the top priority in all parts of the County with pedestrian safety being the prime emphasis of all MCDOT projects.** This emphasis must begin especially on roads leading to schools where there is no bus service and must continue until all roads in the County are made safe for all pedestrians. This will require the County to take legislative action to make sidewalks mandatory preventing homeowners from blocking sidewalk installation. Pedestrians being forced to walk in the street amongst car traffic should not be tolerated.
- Given the high pedestrian severe injury and death figures from vehicular accidents published by MCDOT, sidewalk installation must be accomplished before efforts at opening up County roads to bicycles. By and far, the number of severe pedestrian injuries outstrip those of bicycle accident injuries in number and must be addressed immediately.
- Provide funds to conduct the nationally recognized “Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity” certification training to Montgomery County drivers of taxicabs and wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Provide gap-filling transportation services to older adults and residents with disabilities to prevent missed medical and other vital appointments. (\$120,000)

2) County Establishes Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission -The Commission on People with Disabilities, then Chaired by Dr. Seth Morgan, advocated in October, 2022, the establishment of an Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission, independent of the Commission on People with Disabilities. There is an estimated over 40,000 persons of all ages who have a developmental disability living in our County. Of note, this includes addressing the racial equity and social issues surrounding the increase in the number of students by race who have a disability and are enrolled in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) special education. The County needs to ensure that there is a plan for engaging all families to ensure a positive transition to adult services. Of the 20,585 number of students in 2020 who were in MCPS special education, there was the following increases: Hispanic enrollment increased by 36.9%, African American by 26.5%, Asian by 7.9%, White students by 24.9% and for students who reported two or more races an increase of 4.5%. In the fall of 2020, total enrollment of students in MCPS was 160,561. This new Commission enacted on March 28, 2023 has the authority to advise the State Developmental Disability Administration and federal government. We thank the County Council and County Executive for supporting this initiated by the Commission on People with Disabilities.

3) Support for Programs Serving People with Developmental Disabilities

The Commission supports the funding of the Developmental Disability Supplement. There needs to be increased support for more services for transitioning youth, mental and behavioral health services for younger children and teens with disabilities including people with co-occurring disabilities.

4) Support for Increased Access to Health and Mental health Care

The County should plan and conduct a Telecare/Telehealth demonstration project to improve access to healthcare and support services for older adults (\$250,000). Increase funding for mental health outreach for older adults (Senior Outreach Team) and people with disabilities to eliminate the waiting list for services and assist people to access proper referrals and care.

5) Early Intervention Screening Program for Children ages 0-3

Early diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in childhood has been shown to significantly decrease the lifelong severity of disabling deficits caused by this disorder in up to half of children treated. Availability of tools needed to screen and treat ASD in infants is most urgently needed especially in socioeconomically disadvantaged populations in the County. We request the continued funding that was approved last May to be monitored in its implementation for early intervention screening initiative for this year's budget of \$121,325 (\$621,148 over five years).

6) Establish a County Interagency Board for Employment of People with Disabilities and Designate Manager to Oversee Employment Programs and Outcomes for Contractors

People with disabilities face disproportionate barriers to employment. There is a need to coordinate/oversee the outcomes for all County funded employment programs under an interagency committee and County staff person with overall goals and results monitoring. We recommend that each County funded organization have the goal to have 3-5 performance measures related to outcomes for each contract, along with annual budget amount, so that better, more coordinated decisions can be made in the budgeting and contracting process for the employment of people with disabilities. Currently, there is a County special assistant that oversees Worksource Montgomery but does not oversee all employment contractors/agencies serving people with disabilities. The County spends over a million dollars per year to employ people with disabilities through AP 1-10 contracts in departments such as corrections and libraries. We recommend oversight of funding used for the purpose of employment for all populations.

6) Fund a Shelter for Riley's Lock for Protection near Accessible Canoe/Kayak Launch

The Commission applauds Montgomery Parks for the installation of the accessible launch for kayakers/canoers and other users at Riley's Lock (Seneca Landing Special Park). It is heavily used daily by the general public but is especially benefits people with disabilities (including severely disabled Veterans who were hospitalized at Walter Reed) for access to Seneca Creek and the Potomac River. It used to take an hour to get in the water for some and now about 1 minute. We recommend the County Council provide needed funding through the Parks CIP for the design and construction of a shelter for the picnic area for all but especially for people who have significant disabilities and who have temperature regulation issues to be safer and more comfortable while using and enjoying the park.