

**Commission on Aging  
Meeting Minutes  
May 28, 2020**

**Location:** Zoom Call  
**Time:** 9:30a – 12:30p

<b>Members Present</b>	<b>Members Absent</b>
Jean Dinwiddie, Chair	Karen Maricheau
Amoke Alakoye, Vice-Chair	Ruby Moone
Beverly Rollins, Secretary	
Ryan Wilson, Budget Officer	
Wayne Berman	
Neal Brown	<b>Alumni Members</b>
Jean Dubow	Revathi Vikram
Stephanie Edelstein	
Mort Faller	<b>Guests</b>
Arunima Ghosh	Mary Gies, Legislative Aide to Council President Sidney Katz
Richard Jourdenais	Kurt Martin, Geriatric Service Line Administrator at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center
Miriam Kelty	
Morris Klein	<b>Liaisons</b>
Nanine Meiklejohn	Elisse Barnes, African American Health Program
Karon Phillips	Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Support Program
Edgar Rivas	Denise Israel, Department of Transportation
Maritza Rivera	Leslie Marks, Department of Housing and Community Affairs
Deborah Royster	Aseem Nigam, Department of Housing and Community Affairs
Monica Schaeffer	Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery
Barbara Selter	Jim Resnick, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue
Ann M. Serafenas	
Katie Smith	<b>Staff</b>
Mary Sweeney	Odile Brunetto, Department of Health and Human Services
Tho Tran	Shawn Brennan, Department of Health and Human Services
Hillery Tumba	Tremayne Jones, Department of Health and Human Services
Marsha Weber	
Arthur Williams	
Janice Zalen	

## **Welcome–Jean Dinwiddie, Chair**

Chair Jean Dinwiddie asked the five new Commissioners – Wayne Berman, Joyce Dubow, Maritza Rivera, Ann Serafena, and Katie Smith – to introduce themselves.

## **Speaker: Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Support Program, Area Agency on Aging**

Lylie Fisher is the facilitator of Montgomery County’s Caregiver Support Program. She is the lead for the County’s Dementia Friendly initiative and a member of the Maryland Commission on Caregiving. Prior to her current position, Ms. Fisher was the Director of Community Engagement with Iona Senior Services in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Fisher provided a Powerpoint presentation. She noted that the CoA has spent years looking at the needs of older adults and caregiver challenges. These challenges have been even more acute during the COVID-19 crisis.

Most individuals have limited contact with Montgomery County government and do not know about the caregiving programs that are offered. They do not know how to navigate services; they may see contacting the government as a failure and may not know that HHS staff can help them learn about available services.

Montgomery County offers an Eligibility and Resource Unit to help caregivers. That number is 240-777-3000. The County also offers a respite care program that is administered by the ARC of Montgomery County. This program, where qualified aides visit patient homes, provides up to 140 hours a year for respite care. The program can also help pay for patients to be admitted into a facility for a short-term respite stay. Staff are looking at ways to coordinate efforts by public and private organizations to help caregivers.

Ms. Fisher noted a few milestones: in 2015 the CoA advocated for Montgomery County to establish a Caregiver Support Program, and in 2016 one was established when Ms. Fisher was appointed coordinator. That Program is now part of the National Dementia Awareness Program. Staff have created training information and other helpful information for distribution.

Ms. Fisher is working to ensure that all caregiving information is available online and now Montgomery County has a website for caregivers. Ms. Fisher is also a member of a number of workgroups to develop online resources.

In addition, Montgomery County is always looking at how best to engage diverse communities. For instance, in 2018 staff brought together individuals to start at what the LGBTQ population needs with regard to caregiving. Meetings are still being held to discuss LGBTQ issues.

In 2019, Montgomery County had its first caregiver event. It was held in the Silver Spring Community building and over 200 individuals attended. It was a good opportunity for caregivers to share the challenges they are facing.

Ms. Fisher and her staff are doing in-service training for County staff and other organizations on caregiving issues. In addition, they have developed a podcast program for caregivers on Montgomery County's website, a YouTube channel called Engage@HOME, and also a blog that has over 4,000 subscribers.

### **AAA Director Updates**

Odile Brunetto provided the following updates:

- Within 24 hours of the County's lockdown due to the Pandemic, staff had to change the business model for the Montgomery County Aging Unit's hotline so that employees could work from home. Since the lockdown there has been a 30 percent increase in the number of calls to the hotline.
- The lockdown created a huge change in the Senior Nutrition program. The centers where the meals are usually served are closed, so staff in the County's Recreation Department have been delivering them to individuals' homes. Montgomery County partnered with a caterer and volunteers so that recipients can receive seven frozen meals per week. Also, the County's service of delivering groceries had to be stopped. Those individuals who had that service were enrolled in the frozen meal program and now the number of individuals to whom frozen meals are delivered has doubled.
- With regard to the long-term care ombudsman program: long-term care facility residents are not allowed to have visitors so the ombudsmen cannot stop by to talk with them. When concerns are raised by these residents, HHS staff call the facilities and speak with staff.
- During the COVID lockdown County home care staff are still able to visit individuals in their homes. The staff wear personal protective equipment.
- The County's respite care program has seen a decrease in the number of requests for services. Families are hesitant to have individuals come into their homes because of COVID. However, there has been an increase in the need for respite care for disabled children.
- In April, HHS staff saw a 25 percent drop in the number of calls to Adult Protective Services. Staff think it is because older adults were at home and not at the senior centers where employees are trained to report signs of abuse or neglect. The County reached out to community organizations and told them that Adult Protective Services is still active, and that staff can go into homes. In May, HHS staff saw the number of calls to APS rise again.
- The Pandemic has created many difficult issues within nursing homes, nursing communities, and long-term care facilities. Staff may unknowingly bring the virus into a facility, putting vulnerable older adult residents at risk. One effort that the Governor ordered was for the Maryland Department of Health to organize "Bridge" teams and "Go" teams. Go teams provide testing and gowns and explain to staff how to disinfect and separate infected individuals. Bridge teams help facilities when they become shorthanded. The Go teams will end June 9. Beginning May 31, COVID testing is being shifted to other locations and the Governor is allowing pharmacists in the State to administer the test for COVID. There is also a new kind of test, an oral swab, and professionals do not have to perform them. CoA members raised concerns about the discontinuance of the Go teams and also questioned the new COVID testing's accuracy and reliability. The CoA may work with another commission to raise concerns.

- County staff are looking at establishing a hotel for individuals who cannot quarantine in their own homes. On June 1 a hotel will be set up for first responders who must quarantine.
- The Governor has now said that the State is in phase 1 of opening. The County Executive will be delivering a report shortly to discuss Montgomery County's steps for opening. Many planning workgroups are being formed to help with this. In July, a group will be formed to look at the possibility of a phase 2.
- The Department of Aging and Disability Services is working with individuals with disabilities during the Pandemic. Thirty-eight nonprofit organizations have stepped in to help. Taking care of individuals in group homes is a challenge. The Department of Health's Go teams are visiting them.
- With regard to the County budget: Earlier this month the County Council approved a flat budget for HHS for 2021. The Department received no additional funding in 2021 over its 2020 budget. The Council did fund the hiring of 10 new nurses for school health clinics. It also approved Friday transportation to senior centers, and transportation for the North Potomac senior center. The Council did not, however, provide funding to hire two additional social workers. There will be another Council budget session on June 11 where it will revisit the County budget. A couple of the items it will be looking at are funding for group homes and adult daycare, where employees do not earn minimum wage.
- Chief Brunetto is now the Chief of Montgomery County's Department of Aging and Disability Services. She is also still the director of the County's Area Agency on Aging, but a replacement is being sought.

## **Liaison Updates**

***Leslie Marks, Program Manager in Montgomery County's Division of Housing*** reported that during the COVID crisis she has reached out for lunches to be delivered to affordable housing communities and assisted living facilities. She is also working with groups to deliver hand sanitizer and masks to assisted living facilities. In addition, she is working on rent stabilization and with groups to help individuals who may have lost their jobs and cannot pay rent.

***Elisse Barnes with the African American Health Program*** discussed a YouTube video that the AAHP recorded on April 23 regarding the COVID-19 crisis and the health care disparities it has exposed. The video features several Montgomery County officials and makes an argument about how structural racism has affected African Americans during the COVID crisis.

***Denise Isreal of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation*** reported that her department is offering a new program where individuals can call taxis to have groceries delivered. Also, during the COVID crisis staff have been working to help individuals get rides to medical care and hospitals.

***Marcia Pruzan with Age-Friendly Montgomery*** noted that she will soon be briefing the new CoA members about the Age-Friendly initiative. The Age-Friendly workgroups have been meeting regularly by telephone and have meetings scheduled for June.

## **Commission on Aging Business**

### ***Approval of February CoA Minutes***

The CoA members approved the February meeting minutes.

A question was raised about the status of holding CoA meetings in various senior center locations around the County and Chair Dinwiddie responded that HHS staff are looking into it. She noted, however, that the June and July meetings will probably be held on Zoom. Staff will look for a physical site to hold the September CoA meeting, but, currently, it is unknown when the CoA will begin meeting in person again, and when senior centers will reopen.

### ***Report on Meetings with Council Members***

Chair Dinwiddie reported that many CoA members made calls to the County Council members regarding CoA priorities. All of the Council members were contacted. She asked the CoA members to read the summaries of the calls that were sent out. Those summaries will be sent again to members on request.

### ***Budget Testimony by Chair Dinwiddie, April 14***

On April 14, Chair Dinwiddie provided testimony to the Montgomery County Council by telephone on the County's proposed FY2021 budget.

### ***2019 Annual Report***

Chair Dinwiddie requested that the CoA members review the CoA's 2019 Annual Report and report to her if they have questions or concerns.

### ***Budget Report***

CoA Budget Officer, Ryan Wilson, reported that the CoA has \$4,945.11 in its treasury.

### ***Townhall in Collaboration with Council***

Chair Dinwiddie reported that she, Vice Chair Amoke Alakoye, and Commission member Arthur Williams have been consulting with County Council member, Gabe Albornoz, to set up a CoA/County Council Town Hall meeting. Council members Craig Rice, Nancy Navarro, and Will Jawando, and also Raymond Crowell, Director Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services, are on board to work with the CoA to hold this meeting. Racial justice will be discussed, which was the topic of the CoA's cancelled March forum.

### ***Upcoming CoA Meetings***

- June: The meeting will feature a panel discussion featuring County Council president Sidney Katz, Council member Gabe Albornoz, and Office of Management and Budget director Rich Madaleno.

CoA members discussed the meeting date and voted to change it to June 25. The Executive Committee will meet on June 18.

- July 9: The CoA will set FY22 budget priorities. At this meeting, commissioners will be able to advocate for individual priorities.

## **Committee Reports**

### ***Aging in Community***

Committee Co-chair, Monica Schaeffer, reported that the Committee's May meeting was devoted to looking at the impact COVID-19 has had on the older adult community. At that meeting Chief Brunetto addressed four issues: transportation, food insecurity, social isolation, and community living program services. The Committee has decided to focus on social isolation and also on communicating County resources to County seniors. Commissioner Schaeffer noted that the committee is also looking at employment for older adults. The committee meets the second Tuesday of every month.

### ***Health and Wellness***

Co-chair Neal Brown reported that the COVID-19 numbers are rising at an alarming rate. The problems of individuals not having personal protective equipment available is significant. Priorities for dealing with the Pandemic include accurate testing measures and hazard pay for individuals working in the medical and testing facilities. The committee's next meeting is scheduled for June 2 and will feature a discussion with Eileen Bennett, Montgomery County Ombudsman Program Representative. Co-chair Marsha Weber stated that the Committee has tabled its information gathering on hearing-related issues until another time. At its May meeting the Committee looked at COVID responses and the incidents at different aging facilities. Ms. Weber said that they are also looking at Go and Bridge teams, especially now that the Go Teams are being terminated on June 9. The committee would like to look at how the CoA can advocate to have the Go Teams continue after June 9.

### ***Public Policy***

Co-chair Ryan Wilson reported that the Maryland General Assembly held an abbreviated legislative session and the Montgomery County Council has held sessions by Zoom, including Town Hall meetings. Committee members prepared two letters that were recently approved by the Executive Committee: a cover letter that expressed the CoA's approval of a statement to legislators prepared by the N4A in favor of COVID-19 legislation, and a letter to Montgomery County's Office of Planning providing comments on the Thrive Montgomery initiative. Co-chair Stephanie Edelstein added that several of the bills that the CoA supported in the General Assembly passed. The Maryland- and Community-based waiver program did not pass but legislators will look at it again. Commissioner Morris Klein recently had a letter published in the Washington Post about it.

### ***Other Business***

In closing, CoA members made the following comments:

- The WISH program will be closing at the end of June.
- As the County starts testing health care providers, those providers may be taken out of the workforce. Some challenges for older adults may happen during this time.
- Forbes just noted that 43 percent of the COVID-related deaths have been individuals who were in nursing homes.

### **Adjourn**

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