



**Commission on People with Disabilities  
Meeting Minutes  
October 12, 2022**

**\*\*MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM \*\***

**Welcome and Approval of September 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the September 2022 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the September 2022 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd).

**Welcome to New Commission Members**

Trish welcomed all new Commission members: Sammi Hampton; Coni Nepomuceno; Lisa Quinn, Melissa Wyman; Karen Goss; Karen Herson; Angela Hughes Byrd; Sam Korper; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; and Teresa Villani.

**Presentation of Slate of Officers and Election – David Rice and Eric Cole, Nominating Committee**

Commissioners Eric Cole and David Rice placed into nomination the slate of Trish Gallalee for Chair and Karen Morgret as Vice-Chair. No other nominations were set forth. A motion was made to approve the nominations. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the nominations were unanimously approved.

**Employment Initiatives for Promoting the Hiring People with Disabilities**

***Beth Lash, Regional Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Maryland State Department of Education***

**Website:** <https://dors.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

Beth manages the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) offices in Montgomery and Prince George's County. When she previously spoke to the Commission, she had reported DORS was having statewide issues with hiring and maintaining a stable workforce. She reported since then DORS' has had a significant stabilization its workforce. She has hired 19 staff over the last 18 months and the workforce is now 88% filled. DORS continues to recruit for counselor and secretary positions. Beth also reported that Maryland Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) rates to community habilitation programs increased as of July 1, 2022.

DORS is now managing referrals, intakes and eligibility determination centrally which has streamlined the process. Approximately 65% to 70% of Montgomery County referrals are processed by this central unit allowing staff to improve upon their timeliness and responsiveness. If an individual prefers to conduct their intake in-person, staff from the eligibility unit will meet the individual at their preferred DORS office location.

DORS is also now partnering with the University of Maryland and have developed a Center for Transition and Career Innovation (CTCI). The Center is designed to explore issues related to school-to-work transition for secondary students with disabilities. The Center will eventually manage Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This will allow DORS staff to better manage their workload and enable Pre-ETS to be delivered to the youth more rapidly. Pre-ETS is for students with disabilities who are at least 14 years old and not older than 21 who are currently attending high school, college, or some other recognized education program. Center website: <https://education.umd.edu/research/centers/ctci>.

DORS can now support “earn and learn jobs” through their job development and job coaching model as well as provide job development and job coaching for paid and unpaid internships. This new model will help individuals connect better with the workforce in the future and gain valuable experience. DORS is reviewing the possibility of developing a work-based learning model for adults. Beth reported 2,420 individuals currently have an open case with Montgomery County. Of those cases, 821 are Pre-ETS. Montgomery County achieved 87% of its goal last year currently 124 individuals are currently in an employment status.

Federal law requires that DORS’ VR program must serve people with the most significant disabilities first. To comply with this law, DORS counselors determine the severity of the disability of individuals who are eligible for services, as follows:

- Category 1: Most Significant Disability
- Category 2: Significant Disability
- Category 3: Non-Severe Disability

DORS is required to make an eligibility decision on everyone who applies for services, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Unfortunately, that does not mean they have the capacity to provide services.

DORS continues to only serve individuals that are eligible for Category 1. There are approximately 250 individuals currently on the waiting list in Montgomery County. More information on the waiting list:

<https://dors.maryland.gov/consumers/Pages/waiting.aspx>. Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked if individuals that are eligible for Categories 2 or 3 are referred to WorkSource Montgomery for services. She also asked what category a person who is deaf would be eligible. Beth said individuals who are deaf automatically are at least a category two but it would also depend on their individual disabilities and barriers to employment. She also reported that individuals are automatically referred to WorkSource Montgomery as part of the process and acknowledged that there could be a better collaboration between counselors and workforce partners when making these referrals or troubleshooting services to individuals to ensure a better outcome.

Commissioners can contact Beth at 301-306-3622 or via email at [laura.lash@maryland.gov](mailto:laura.lash@maryland.gov).

***Linda Hoyt, Employment Specialist, Autism Hiring Program, Howard County Autism Society***

**Website:** <https://howard-autism.org/autism-hiring-program/>

The Howard County Autism Society (HCAS) is a resource for individuals with Autism and their families throughout their lifespan. HCAS has been in existence for over 30 years. HCAS recently merged with the Montgomery County Autism Society. The national Autism Society is headquartered in Rockville.

In 2020, HCAS began a hiring program due to the need for assistance in the areas of employment for individuals who are not served by DDA or DORS. HCAS received seed money from the Howard County Innovation Grant as well as the Maryland Developmental Disability Council to start the program. They also received a grant from Howard County Workforce Development in March 2022. Three cohorts have completed the program since the program’s inception. Each cohort consists of five to six individuals. Four Montgomery County residents have completed the program. Overall, 14 of the 16 individuals who completed the program are still gainfully employed and has received 77 applicants to date. The program received 20 applicants for its fourth cohort. Interested individuals from all Maryland counties are welcome to apply to the program.

The ten-week curriculum-based hiring program offers peer groups that work on valuable life and work skills. They collaborate with the Howard County Work Center, community partners and access resources for independence. Psychologists work with individuals regarding potential anxieties about the workplace. HCAS hopes to grow employer relations in Montgomery County and work with community partners to serve the needs of individuals

that fall between service gaps. Their goal is to build partnerships that would allow more individuals to achieve meaningful and successful employment and working collaboratively with others serving individuals of this population. HCAS recently submitted a recovery grant in Montgomery County and is potentially earmarked for a grant by Congressman John Sarbanes that would help build those partnerships.

HCAS has worked with a variety of employers with all position types. They have also assisted with Northrop Grumman's internship program, helped onboard several individuals with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Other job types include docent, manufacturing, security, office administration at a law firm and MRI aide at Howard County General. In Montgomery County specifically, HCAS is working with two engineering firms as well as Montgomery County Department of Recreation and Montgomery Parks. Trish offered to connect Linda with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Commissioners can contact Linda via email at [lindahyt@comcast.net](mailto:lindahyt@comcast.net).

**Cynthia Grissom, Director Business Solutions, WorkSource Montgomery, Inc.**

**Website:** <https://worksourcemontgomery.com>

In early 2021, Anthony Weatherstone joined WorkSource Montgomery (WSM) as Executive Director. Since then American Job Centers (AJC) have doubled in size and staff size continues to grow. Cynthia said now is the perfect time for persons with disabilities to become employed due to the job market demand. WSM works with individuals to gain skills to become more marketable regardless of limitations. WSM depends on DORS for referrals. Outreach to the community has been the biggest barrier. AJCs are located in Germantown and Wheaton. Assistive technology is mostly located at these centers. Center staff are scheduled to be trained on how to use and operate the available assistive technology. AJCs are always looking for suggestions for assistive technology. The [Helping Individuals Reach Employment \(H.I.R.E.\)](#) satellite location in East County assists job seekers with gaining the tools and skills needed to succeed in their job search and is also available in several libraries. WSM will be deploying a mobile AJC to provide a presence at community events and institutions in an effort to take services into the community and offer improved access to customers. WSM also operates a workforce re-entry program within the Montgomery County Correction Facility.

Another program available to job seekers is *SkillUp® Montgomery*, a virtual career services program that offers free and unlimited access to more than 5,000 high-quality online training courses for 180 days (6 months) that users can take at their leisure. Hiring managers view it as a red flag if a job seeker has been out of employment for an extended period of time. These classes help job seekers increase their marketability.

Cynthia reported the WSM website has been redesigned to be fully compliant with Section 508. WSM hired a consultant that created an asset map to identify available resources and pre-existing strengths of the community to address the multitude of needs faced by the targeted populations including persons with disabilities. With support and input from their workforce ecosystem partners, they identified and confirmed 111 organizations and 293 adult services across Montgomery County. Cynthia encouraged providers in attendance to include their agency on the asset map for serving persons with disabilities. Asset map: <https://worksourcemontgomery.com/community-asset-map>.

WSM released the Workforce Recovery Network funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Network is a funding opportunity designed to support local Community Based Organizations' implementation of innovative workforce development programming facilitating residents' re-attachment to employment. Programs are focused on strategic workforce initiatives that assist Montgomery County residents who have experienced hardship due to the pandemic. In addition to serving individuals negatively impacted by the pandemic, the programs may also serve individuals who are: low-income, have criminal backgrounds, have disabilities, homeless, Veterans, English language learners, youth, public assistance recipients, or have barriers to employment. WSM received \$1,000,000 in funding and anticipates ten awards of \$100,000 each. WSM issued a request for proposals. Cynthia reported one of the proposals received by WSM was by Sunflower Bakery which is offering a six-month program that includes a 13-week pastry art training class and 12 weeks of supervised monitoring at the start of any kind of employment. WSM is providing on-the-job training during the 13-week training class. Participants will

receive assistance with mock interviewing, job readiness skills and connections to employers. HCAS will also be a recipient of grant money.

This year County Executive Marc Elrich established the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Workforce Task Force. The HCBS Workforce Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of participants from the public and private sectors, including various departments of the Montgomery County Government (MCG), as well as representatives from the educational, provider, and non-profit communities. The Task Force is charged with developing a report on the state of the direct care workforce in Montgomery County by November 2022 that describes the current state of the direct care workforce, identifies gaps in the workforce infrastructure, and makes recommendations for improving the workforce in Montgomery County. Cynthia reported the study of direct care workforce for individuals with developmental disabilities may become an independent study due to the complexity of issues associated with that workforce. A study of direct care workforce for veterans was also separated to be a standalone study. Jeneva Stone, Commissioner, reported the state of Maryland is also conducting a multiyear taskforce on the health care worker crisis. She has been appointed to the data subgroup. State taskforce website: <https://health.maryland.gov/Pages/Workforce-Commission.aspx>

Job seekers do not have to disclose if they have a disability when using services at AJCs. From July 1, 2022 to present only 9 individuals have self-closed as having a disability. For those seeking services through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), only 58 individuals have self-disclosed as having a disability. In comparison to the previous year, 34 individuals within WIOA self-disclosed as having a disability. Data obtained does not break down into disability type. Justin Hack, Intake Coordinator, reported WSM job seekers do not want to disclose their disability on intake forms as they feel it hurts their job prospects.

Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, said it is difficult for individuals who are visually impaired or who are blind to complete the online application for unemployment as the process is not screenreader accessible. Jeneva agreed that the website poses accessibility issues. Cynthia said she will notify the state about this accessibility issue.

***Darryl Gorman, Senior Advisor, Office of Human Resources, Montgomery County Government (MCG)***

***Website:*** <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HR/Recruitment/DisabilityInitiative.html#1>

MCG has approximately 450 vacancies on a regular basis. This number does not include seasonal employees. Vacancies include positions for nurses, therapists, permit technicians, and bus drivers. The County had a hiring freeze until October 2021. Since then there has been an increase of over 200 new positions in the current fiscal year budget. While the County may fill 90 or more positions every month, approximately 40 employees are leaving County employment due to retirement or resignation. The County filled 1,364 jobs last year. Typically as long as the person can meet the minimum qualifications for a position, they can become employed by MCG.

Darryl reported on the County's hiring initiatives:

- Leap4MCG is a new hiring initiative and a collaboration between Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) and Office of Human Rights (OHR). The purpose of this program is to provide applicants with disabilities who have limited work experience and have not held merit positions with MCG, employment opportunities with the County with the intent of developing skills and gaining experience that may lead to employment post LEAP4MCG participation. Employment can be in or outside MCG. These are two-year full-time or part-time positions that offer full benefits including annual and sick leave and eligibility for retirement. The first cohort has an Office Services Coordinator within OHR, an Administrative Specialist with Department of General Services (DGS), and a third position coming online soon in the County Executive's Office. The next cohort will start in July 2023.
- Project Search Montgomery program provides education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through an innovative workforce and career development model that benefits the individual, the workplace and community. Interns are unpaid and work on a volunteer basis. The program runs from September to June and is based on the school year calendar. Interns participate in three 10-week,

intensive worksite internships supported by SEEC job coaches. Ivy Mount School provides educational resources. The program is limited to a maximum of 10 interns per year. The program is open to Montgomery County transitioning youth with disabilities (recent high school students or recent high school graduates) or young adults between the ages of 18 and 28. The program is funded by DDA. 90 Project Search interns have completed the program since its inception in 2012. Interns have a continuous employment rate of approximately 67%. The pandemic has had an impact on this program. Only six interns are in the program currently and the County is working to increase participation. The opportunity to telework has increased since the pandemic. The Project Search program has moved into a new classroom which was donated by DGS.

- Hiring preference is available to persons with disabilities, Veterans, and Veterans with disabilities. Over 250 individuals have been hired through this program.
- Non-competitive hiring process for individuals with severe disabilities. This initiative was approved by Montgomery County voters in 2012. Montgomery County is one of the few jurisdictions to have this special hiring authority. The non-competitive hire can be applied to the position before the active recruitment process occurs. Over 25 individuals have been hired through this process since the program's inception.

The County is partnering with organizations including WSM to offer job fairs in different arenas. The County is hosting a job fair for public safety careers on October 22. They previously held a job fair for individuals who have commercial driver licenses. Darryl would like to work with this Commission to host a job fair for persons with disabilities. He wants to work together to continue to increase employment for persons with disabilities.

Avner Shapiro, Commissioner, asked if the County offers job training programs similar to what Sunflower Bakery offers that would help individuals transition into the workplace. For example, the short-term seasonal positions can have positions set aside for persons with disabilities. Darryl said it is something the County could consider. He will connect with Karen Hochberg, Targeted Recruitment Specialist, to follow up on the recommendation.

Tom Liniak, former Commissioner, noted that in his experience as Director of JSSA's Specialized Employment program the best training programs are those things the County needs in volume. One issue with the County's internship program is the training path does not lead to hireable jobs. The train-to-hire situation is a win-win. Individuals receive training and it is an alternative interview pathway into jobs. Darryl appreciated the suggestion and said he will also look into this recommendation. Cynthia said WSM can subsidize on-the-job training anywhere from six weeks to three months as long as the individual is then hired by the employer. This takes the risk off of the employer and the individual is receiving necessary skilled training.

The floor was opened to questions once all presenters had spoken.

Karen Herson, Commissioner, reported she works with the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which issued a statement today regarding changing terminology and how to talk about persons with disabilities. She asked if the Commission does outreach to employers during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported MCG had a contract with TransCen which held meetings with private employers, but those have not been taking place for several years now. Trish suggested using the November meeting to do some brainstorming on how to do more outreach.

Jeneva raised a concern about the language the County uses for its programs for people with disabilities. She suggested avoiding phrasing such as "severe" disabilities or "low/high functioning." Instead they should be referring to the need of the disabled person for low or high supports. Other usages are negatively focused. Lisa Quinn, Commissioner, seconded Jeneva's recommendation. Functioning labels can unintentionally restrict opportunities that persons with disabilities provide or offer. Trish noted that the use of the term "severe" is due to language used by the federal government. She added that the federal government has a new disability equity inclusion and accessibility initiative that may be reviewing this issue already.

Betsy suggested holding a follow-up discussion on issues discussed this evening.

**Sensory Trail at Fairview Urban Park, Silver Spring Perspectives and Comments - Bob Green, ADA Design & Construction Project Manager II, M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks, Park Development Division**

**PowerPoint:** [https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CPWD/SensoryTrailUrbanPark\\_PresentationCPWD.pdf](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CPWD/SensoryTrailUrbanPark_PresentationCPWD.pdf)

Please review PowerPoint presentation.

Bob said the presentation is a general idea of the project and wanted Commissioner feedback to help Montgomery Parks design the sensory trail. Fairview Urban Park has been chosen as the site for the trail. It is located in downtown Silver Spring off of Spring Street and Georgia Avenue. It is a small, partially developed park.

The floor was opened to questions.

Trish said she has concerns making the sensory trail multi-use as bicyclists can be potentially dangerous for persons with low vision or who are blind or for any individual who would not be able to move out of their way quickly. She prefers the wooded area as an option as it can provide shade during the summertime. The quieter aspect would also provide a safer environment.

Tonya Gilchrist, Commissioner, asked if the blue dust that would be used for the trails is accessible for wheelchair users. She recommended that the adjacent playground be made accessible and to ensure accessible parking is available.

Linda recommended installing double fencing along the sensory trail for safety and to prevent children from running into the street.

Betsy asked Commissioners to send her any additional comments. She will compile and send on to Bob.

**Chair and Vice-Chair Report**

The Steering Committee will meet via Zoom next Wednesday October 19. Trish asked that the meeting be held from 5:15pm to 6:15pm.

County Executive Marc Elrich and County Council President Gabe Alborno will be presenting a proclamation next Tuesday October 18 to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Trish will be attending and will give remarks.

**Ex-Officio Member Updates**

Tabled due to time constraints.

**Announcements**

Tabled due to time constraints.

**Meeting adjourned – 7:35pm**

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities  
November 2022 Meeting and Events Calendar**

**Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday November 9**

6pm to 7:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

**Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee – Monday November 14**

4pm to 5:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced



**Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday November 16**

5pm to 6pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I  
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

## Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities Attendance Report November 2021 – October 2022

[illegible]

**Attendance Policy:** A Voting Member may miss up to 3 meetings within a one year rolling period. Voting Members who miss more than 3 meetings in that period or who miss 3 consecutive meetings will be automatically removed. Waivers may be requested for absences caused by extenuating circumstances.

### Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members

[illegible]