



## **Commission on People with Disabilities Meeting Agenda**

**Wednesday, May 14, 2025**

**6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**

**Jamila Michael-Sobratti, Vice-Chair**

### **Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://montgomerycountymd-gov.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=89196828349>

**If you want to call into the meeting**, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #. Those calling into the meeting can press \*6 to mute and unmute their phone. **If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting**, they must use the “hand raise” function. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the Zoom link to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press \*9 to raise your hand.

- 6:00 Call to Order & Approval of April 2025 Meeting Minutes – Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**
- 6:10 Deaf or Hard of Hearing Resources and Services – Lori Berrong, MFA, ATACP, AT Specialist, Executive Director, Assistive Technology Program (MDTAP) Maryland Department of Disabilities and Dr. Noe Turcios, Ed.D., Statewide Coordinator for Deaf Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services**
- 6:45 Housing Updates – Rebecca Grayson, Disability Program Coordinator, Housing Opportunities Commission**  
**Housing Committee Update – Deborah Rozell and Jamila Michael-Sobratti**  
**Property Tax Programs for People with Disabilities – Rebecca Murphy**
- 7:00 Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner, Liaison to IDDC**
- 7:10 Chair and Vice-Chair Updates**
- 7:20 Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Updates – Commission Members**
- 7:25 Community Speaks – Public invited to make comments, 2-minute limit, time permitting. For profit companies who want to speak should contact the Commission in advance. The Open Meetings Act does not afford the public any right to participate in the meeting, it does assure the public right to observe the meeting and the making of decisions by the public body at open meetings. Public participants generally are not invited to speak during presentations and time is set aside at the end of the meeting to allow the public to speak. This policy will be strictly enforced moving forward.**
- 7:30 Adjourn**

**ADA Reasonable Accommodations:** Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least five (5) full business days before the meeting. To request any reasonable accommodation to participate in the meeting, please contact Carly Clem in advance at [carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov) or call 202-853-1109. In all situations, a good faith effort will be made to provide accommodations. For any additional questions or concerns, please contact Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison at [betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov) or please call 240-418-4865, MD Relay 711.



## **Commission on People with Disabilities Meeting Summary Minutes**

**May 14, 2025**

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

### **Welcome and Approval of April 2025 Meeting Minutes**

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the April 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the April 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd).

### **Deaf or Hard of Hearing Resources and Services – Lori Berrong, MFA, ATACP, AT Specialist, Executive Director, Technology Assistance Program, Maryland Department of Disabilities**

Website: <https://mdod.maryland.gov/mdtap/Pages/MDTAP-Home.aspx>

The Maryland Department of Disabilities Technology Assistance Program (MDTAP) enhances the lives of all Marylanders with disabilities, older Marylanders, and their families by providing access to assistive technology (AT) devices and services. MDTAP offers a variety of services including assistive technology libraries across the state, AT demonstrations, consultations, short-term device loans, a high-tech AT Reuse Center (to access gently used equipment for free), trainings, webinars, and a low-interest financial loan program. MDTAP also provides one-on-one information and referral to help consumers find needed disability-related services.

- **Consultations, Demos and Loans**

MDTAP provides both in-person and virtual opportunities to meet with our staff, discuss needs, review settings where the technology is needed, and explore AT that can help each person achieve the goal to live, work, and learn more independently. They provide an opportunity for consumers to try out equipment, hands-on or virtually, and explore a variety of like-devices to see what is most useful. Demonstrations are consumer-driven, meaning that staff will never tell a client what device to use, but will rather help that person find the device that is most useful, useable, and comfortable. AT can be borrowed, free of charge, for up to 4-weeks at a time. Consumers can meet in-person to pick up devices or MDTAP can ship directly to a client and provide virtual set-up & instructional support. Consumers are encouraged to take the devices with them to school, work, and in the community. For a complete listing of items available, [click here to browse inventory](#).

- **[High-Tech AT Reuse Center](#)**

Take in donations of assistive technology, clean, refurbish, repair and donate them back out to Marylanders with disabilities in need. Commonly donated equipment includes CCTVs/video magnifiers/magnifiers, iDevices, adapted computer keyboards, mice, switches, speech communication devices, amplified telephones, and eye-gaze systems. Do not carry or donate medical equipment.

- **[AT Loan Program](#)**

The Loan Program helps Maryland residents with disabilities and their families qualify for low-interest loans to buy equipment that will help them live, work, and learn more independently. Anyone who intends to use the loan to buy assistive technology for a Maryland resident with a disability can apply including people with disabilities, family members and friends. All loans facilitated through the AT Financial Loan Program are offered at a discounted interest rate. There are two ways to be approved: through the lender with a discounted interest rate or through the ATLP with a discounted interest rate. All interest rates are subject to change and vary depending on credit worthiness. Rates vary based on creditworthiness. Rates will be disclosed at the time of application processing and approval. Loans range from \$500 to \$70,000.

- **Portable Ramp Program**

MDTAP has partnered with centers for independent living across the state to make available a variety of portable ramps to consumers who need short-term solutions for getting in and out of their homes. Ramps are typically loaned for up to 120 days (4 months). The portable ramp loan must be in compliance with the ADA requirements for portable ramp access. The ramp borrower must arrange to pick up the ramp from the local center for independent living and coordinate the return of the ramp at the duration of the loan. [Contact your local Center for Independent Living](#) to inquire about borrowing a portable ramp.

- **3D Printing Lab**

MDTAP hosts a small 3D Printing lab, utilized to fabricate an array of low-tech Assistive Devices which Marylanders with disabilities can request to receive free of charge. View [3D AT Catalogue and Request Form](#).

MDTAP is a federally funded program under the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In October 2024, MDTAP was awarded an AT Alternative Financing Program grant totaling \$700,000 from ACL to improve and expand the Assistive Technology Loan program. This grant creates a robust hearing aid and related hearing assistive technologies financing program that is efficient and accessible to reduce the barriers faced by individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing. Funding will cover loan guarantees for over-the-counter hearing aids, prescription hearing aids, cochlear implants (the device itself), personal loop systems, personal assistive listening systems, home alerting systems, adapted telephone systems, and other AT designated to support someone who is deaf/hard of hearing. It was noted that Hearview live captioning glasses have become popular. A portion of this funding will also be used to purchase a wide variety of Hearing Assistive Technologies (HAT) and provide direct AT consultations and short-term equipment loans of these HAT devices through MDTAP. For more information, view the [Maryland Hearing Aid & Hearing Assistive Technology Resource Guide](#).

The floor was opened to questions.

- **Is there a slide scale for hearing aid purchase?** Individuals wanting to purchase hearing aids can use the low interest financial loan program and get an extended loan term to lower costs.
- **Can local government agencies use MDTAP for accommodations for individuals who are deaf?** MDTAP only provides sign language interpreting services for constituents who have requested them for a visit. MDTAP does not have the capacity to provide sign language interpreting services to other agencies.
- **What are the reviews for the Hearview live captioning glasses?** They are not a long-term solution but would be helpful during a movie or a meeting. Some individuals love them while another individual stated that the glasses triggered migraines. MDTAP enables individuals to try AT before purchasing so they may see if it works for their needs. AT is not one size fits all.
- **Has MDTAP developed a strategy to manage funding cuts that have been proposed by the current administration?** AT is one of the few disability programs that has not been proposed to be cut in the FY26 budget. Internally, MDTAP has decided to become more self-sufficient. [Legislation was recently passed that officially codified MDTAP in state statute](#). The bill also established the Assistive Technology Services Fund. The purpose of the fund is to receive revenue from assistive technology services provided by the program, including assistive technology assessments and training, and digital accessibility training, website evaluations, and remediation services. The fund may only be used to support the operations of the program, including the purchase of assistive technology devices.
- **What is the process for applying for a portable ramp?** The portable ramp program was established in 2016. Individuals may request a ramp for up to 4 months to fill a short-term need. MDTAP can assist with determining what is available to support a more permanent modification, if needed. MDTAP maintains an [online Home Modifications directory](#).
- **Does MDTAP interact with the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) or provide services through DDA waiver funds?** MDTAP tries to partner with DDA as much as possible

and provide guidance on AT. It is not uncommon for individuals who are denied AT through the waiver to reach out to MDTAP. Staff facilitate longer conversations with Coordination of Community Services (CCS), provider agencies and DDA to re-evaluate the denials to get the AT approved. Staff do their best to guide people to funding resources when needed. MDTAP also sits on a technology task force focused on building awareness of AT. The [Maryland Accessible Telecommunications Program](#) provides telecoms to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind.

## **Deaf or Hard of Hearing Resources and Services – Dr. Noe Turcios, Ed.D., Statewide Coordinator for Deaf Services, Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Website: <https://dors.maryland.gov/consumers/specialized/deaf/Pages/default.aspx>

The Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) works in partnership with people with disabilities, and other stakeholders, to provide services resulting in employment and independence. Vocational rehabilitation, or employment services, are designed to help job seekers with disabilities obtain competitive employment in integrated work settings. DORS also provides independent living services to individuals who are 55 or older and who are blind or have a vision impairment through the [Independent Living Older Blind](#) program. DORS will assign a counselor who will talk with you about DORS services and find out if you are eligible or qualified for services. DORS partners with people with physical, emotional, intellectual, developmental, sensory and learning disabilities who want to maintain employment or become employed, by providing services such as career assessment and counseling, assistive technology, job training, higher education and job placement. Many DORS counselors are specially trained to work with specific groups like high school [students](#) or individuals who are [deaf/hard-of-hearing](#), [blind](#) or have persistent [mental illness](#).

DORS does not have sufficient staff resources to provide services to all individuals determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. When the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program was reauthorized by Congress in 2014, they made a major change, creating a second program that DORS administers called [Pre-Employment Transitioning Services](#) (Pre-ETS), which is focused strictly on students with disabilities who are between the ages of 14 and 21. Services include career exploration, post-secondary education after high school, job training, work readiness training, self-advocacy, and work-based learning experiences. DORS can provide transportation if needed. Services are provided short-term.

Congress also mandated existing resources be shifted, including funding and staff, to administer Pre-ETS. As a result of the tremendous growth of Pre-ETS since 2014, DORS has had to shift staff from the VR program to the Pre-ETS program. As such, we no longer have the human resources available to manage both programs. Therefore, DORS has a Waiting List for the VR program.

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:

- **If you are eligible for services and have a “most significant disability” (Category 1):** you can begin your rehabilitation program without delay.
- **If you are eligible for services and have a “significant disability” (Category 2):** You will be placed on the waiting list. DORS will serve persons on the waiting list as soon as resources are available. Individuals on the waiting list the longest will be served first. DORS is actively working to reduce the waitlist.
- **DORS does not expect to provide services to eligible individuals with “non-severe disabilities” (Category 3) in the foreseeable future.**

Most of the time, you would be considered to have a significant disability if you have a physical or mental disability that limits your ability to function in one or more of these areas: the ability to walk; the ability to use your arms and hands; the ability to talk; the ability to take care of your personal needs; the ability to get along with others; and/or the ability to adapt to the work place.

If you are blind or deaf, have moderate or severe cognitive disabilities, or have epilepsy (and have not been seizure-free for two years), you automatically meet the definition of a significant disability (Category 2).

If DORS cannot assist you at this time, an [American Job Center](#) (a.k.a. One-Stop) through WorkSource Montgomery may have programs and services that could help you become employed. There are also additional resources for job seekers with disabilities in DORS' [Job Seeking Tools](#).

DORS Workforce & Technology Services are offered in your community, on the campus of the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC), and virtually. The WTC campus is located in northeast Baltimore. Job seekers who are using services at WTC can stay in the onsite dorms or commute to their classes. Services are available to active DORS consumers. These services include academic tutoring and GED; behavioral health services; deaf and hard-of-hearing services; dormitory services; employment services; rehabilitation technology; work readiness programs; and career training programs such as automotive detailing, automotive general service technician, automotive refinishing, childcare provider, CVS retail academy, CVS pharmacy technician, environmental services, food service, Professional Animal Workers (PAWS), and warehouse technician. Transportation funds may be provided for an individual commuting from home to WTC or for an individual who is using WTC REB&E services to commute to a community program. Uniforms, special clothing, shoes, materials such as textbooks or other items, and basic tools needed for job placement may also be purchased or provided by WTC for individuals enrolled at WTC.

The DORS Deaf and Hard of Hearing Unit (DHHU) was established in 2023. [View DHHU brochure](#). DHHU serves Maryland job seekers who are deaf or hard of hearing, helping them prepare for, find, and keep, stable employment. While helping deaf or hard of hearing job seekers to achieve their employment goals, the DHHU also promotes self-advocacy and independence. If you are eligible for DORS services, you will work with a [DHHU Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf \(RCD\)](#) which are located at DORS offices throughout Maryland. All DHHU staff are fluent in ASL, many RCDs are Deaf themselves, and all are competent in Deaf culture. The DHHU team coordinates interpreting services for employment related services, including the use of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). RCDs can provide information about assistive technology (AT) such as assisted listening devices, alerting devices connected to a doorbell, telephone, or alarm, and training on how to use the AT. The DHHU team also assists deaf or hard of hearing students as they prepare to transition from school to post-school life. The DHHU team works to increase awareness of the needs of deaf or hard of hearing job seekers among DORS staff, businesses, community rehabilitation partners, workforce partners, and the general public. The [Supervisor, Rehabilitation Counselors and Staff Specialist for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services](#) are fluent in ASL and competent in Deaf culture. Dr. Turcios is the Statewide Coordinator for Services and is responsible for consultations, trainings, outreach, education and advocacy for the unit.

The floor was opened to comments and questions.

- **It was suggested that other government agencies, particularly DDA and Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), replicate DORS and offer deaf field coordinators in their offices.**
- **What types of training are offered to employers?** DHHU provides training and education so employers understand inclusion. DHHU also strongly suggests that sign language interpreters be provided by employers. DORS services are not provided long-term. Once the individual feels independent enough to do their job, DORS will close their case. If the individual loses their job, they can apply for a new job through DORS.
- **How much support is offered to employees once they have been hired?** Individuals have to learn how to advocate for themselves and how to communicate with their boss regarding providing sign language interpreters. DORS partners' with the job coach and the employer.
- **Are individuals referred to American Job Centers if they are unable to take advantage of DORS services?** It is certainly an option that can be provided if necessary.
- **At one time, DORS and Abilities Unlimited identified 300 foreign born immigrants in Montgomery County who were illiterate in their own language and in American Sign Language.** Some of the individuals do not have green cards, VISAs or work permits so DORS cannot provide services. If the individual had a work permit based on learning experience, then the individual could take advantage of those services. Pat Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), reported students using Pre-ETS have no other requirements than an IEP and a 504 plan. MCPS works with students to get them employment skills prior to graduating as well as working on American Sign



Language skills while also moving forward with obtaining documentation. Community College American Sign Language classes are not designed for individuals from other countries. DORS has American Sign Language tutors ready to meet on-one-one and can also provide Certified Deaf Interpreters.

- **Do individuals receive any follow-up services after they have been employed?** During the 90-day trial period individuals have a job coach that works with the employer. During that 90 days once all requirements have been met, the case will be closed. Employers need to provide their own sign language interpreters.
- **The DC Metro area has the highest incidence of deaf and hard of hearing individuals, due in large part to Gallaudet and the federal government having a long history of hiring deaf and hard of hearing individuals.** It is not known how many deaf and hard of hearing residents live in Montgomery County as the U.S. Census data only asks participants if they have a hearing disability. MCPS does have data available. DORS would be able to provide data relating to the number of deaf or hard of hearing applicants and placements. It was suggested the Commission contact the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing for data.

### **Housing Updates – Rebecca Grayson, Disability Program Coordinator, Housing Opportunities Commission**

Emergency housing choice vouchers, specifically for individuals with disabilities, and several housing grants are being considered cut from the budget. Voucher programs may be cut back to two years. The current administration would like to increase vouchers for individuals coming out of the foster care program. The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program may also be cut by 40% with a focus on able-bodied participants moving forward. FSS is a program that enables HUD-assisted families to increase their earned income and reduce their dependency on welfare assistance and rental subsidies. An interest-bearing escrow account is established by the PHA/owner for each participating family. Any increases in the family's rent as a result of increased earned income during the family's participation in the program result in a credit to the family's escrow account. Once a family graduates from the program, they may access the escrow and use it for any purpose, including purchasing a home.

At this time, it is unknown how HOC would manage displaced families. HOC does have some funding in reserves. Individuals in HOC owned properties would have an easier time setting lower rates versus those in the voucher program where rent costs are controlled by the landlords.

Shameen Anthanio-Williams asked to discuss an issue regarding vouchers cost share increases.

### **Housing Committee Update – Deborah Rozell and Jamila Michael-Sobratti**

No update.

### **Property Tax Programs for People with Disabilities – Rebecca Murphy**

No updates.

### **Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC) – John Whittle, Commissioner, Liaison to IDDC**

IDDC will be meeting next Wednesday May 21 in person at 401 Hungerford Drive. A call-in option is also offered. There are two active subcommittees – Special Education Subcommittee and the Policies and Program Committee, which is working on direct care workers for private employment of various agencies. It was reported that the Maryland Department of Health completed a thorough analysis of projected Medicaid cuts and how those cuts could affect persons with disabilities. John will email Betsy the rest of his update due to time constraints.

### **Chair and Vice-Chair Updates**

Tonya reported she has been participating in Therapeutic Recreation Advisory Meetings. Montgomery County Recreation and Montgomery Parks are seeking feedback on how to serve persons with disabilities in their recreation programs.

## **Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Updates – Commission Members**

Tabled due to time constraints. Ex-officio members were asked to email their updates to Betsy who will share with Commissioners.

## **Community Speaks**

Tabled due to time constraints.

## **Adjournment**

7:32 p.m.

## **Attendees**

**Commissioners Present:** Azeb Adere; Shameen Anthanio-Williams; Jennifer Berzok; Tonya Gilchrist; Karen Goss; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Rebecca Murphy; Deborah Rozell; Mary Simons; Teresa Villani; John Whittle

**Commissioners Absent:** Felicia Brannon; Tria Gray; Leslie Green Lyles; Samuel Korper; Christian Navarro; Nina Russell; Christopher Sinsheimer

**Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present:** Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team, Department of General Services (DGS); Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation

**Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent:** Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation; Soumya Nukala, Office of Human Resources

**County Staff Present:** None.

**Commission Staff Present:** Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

**Public:** Lori Berrong, Maryland Department of Disabilities; Dr. Noe Turcios, Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS); Seth Morgan; Karen Morgret; Cindy Buddington; Tu Anthanio; Jenni Jackson (Sign Language Interpreter); Kate Lacey (Sign Language Interpreter)

## **Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities June 2025 Meeting and Events Calendar**

### **Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday June 11**

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

### **Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday June 18**

5 p.m. to 6 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager