



Commission on People with Disabilities

November 12, 2025, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair

Jamila Michael-Sobratti, Vice-Chair

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom: *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.*

Agenda

6:05 Call to Order & Approval of October 2025 Meeting Minutes – Tonya Gilchrist, Chair

6:10 State Hiring Initiatives for People with Disabilities – Jade Gingerich, Executive Director, Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, Maryland Department of Disabilities

6:40 Montgomery County Police Department and their Work with People with Disabilities Work with Autism/IDD, Alzheimer’s and Dementia – Officer Laurie Reyes, Special Operations Division, Autism/IDD, Alzheimer’s/Dementia Unit Education Outreach Empowerment Follow-up Response; Crisis intervention Team - Officers Amy Stoughton and Kelly Cox

7:10 Updates – Ex-Officio Members, 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 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 or please call 240-418-4865, MD Relay 711.



Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities November 12, 2025 – Meeting Minutes

Meeting Location

Held virtually via Zoom.

Call To Order

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Meeting Agenda Items

1. **State Hiring Initiatives for People with Disabilities – Jade Gingerich, Executive Director, Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, Maryland Department of Disabilities**

Jade reviewed a [PowerPoint presentation - Maryland Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy](#).

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- **Are there plans to address employment barriers that current high school graduates have been experiencing? Some have not been able to identify internships or employment despite being connected to the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and WorkSource Montgomery.** MDOD will be making some recommendations regarding system disconnects. Individuals exiting the school system should be career ready with necessary knowledge, skills and abilities and have had internship experiences while in school that lead to post-school employment. The current environment is not job-seeker friendly. Limited jobs in general impacts the disability population more. It is particularly challenging with many businesses and the federal government shutting down jobs. There is also concern about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) taking away entry level jobs, however this can have implications for businesses as there are not workers in the pipeline for next level jobs.
- **How can community-based organizations partner with MDOD to bridge the gap?** MDOD provides policy work and does not provide direct services or funding. They are looking into strategies that would allow businesses and employers to identify candidates in their community. They are also looking at ways to utilize existing structures to give businesses the option to hire people with disabilities and to facilitate access.
- **Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that [Montgomery County Government passed a non-competitive hiring process](#) in 2012.** As part of the Non-competitive Hiring Process, the County maintains a database of applicants who are eligible for this initiative. To add your information to the database, fill out the [Hiring Initiative Registration for Employment form](#) and upload your Schedule A Letter and resume. This database is not linked to a specific position but establishes a pool of applicants who can be considered for openings as they occur. The current Manager, Recruitment and Selection Division, is seeing to expand the program. Betsy noted that there are currently 300 to 500 applicants per job posting and it can take 3 to 6 months to be hired.

- **Oftentimes there is a gap in services for individuals graduating from high school and Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) services do not start for many months after graduation. This can lead to family members having to quit their jobs and stay home with their child. It can also take several months before they can find a job. Are there any efforts to solve this problem?** There can be a funding gap as funding does not start until July 1 due to the state's fiscal year. If they are employed and eligible, DORS could provide short-term services until long-term supports are available from DDA. Jade acknowledged that the gaps are getting longer. MDOD is working on a linkage tool to help facilitate sharing of data and information to ensure supports follow along to keep the individual employed in the interim. Another challenge is families who are opting into self-direction. DORS is not able to support self-direction. Federal funding can only pay out to registered providers. DORS also does not pay as robustly as DDA due to extreme funding limitations and providers are not as likely to take on individuals if they are not receiving long-term, sustainable DDA funding. MDOD is aware of the issue with DORS and would like to have discussions to align the systems better.
 - It was noted that the state budget only details half a year of DDA funding.
- Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), reported she attended a workgroup this morning for the ODEAP new diploma pathway initiative. She also reported Arc Montgomery County has a new program currently accepting applications for young adults falling between the cracks after leaving internship programs who are not fully employed.

2. Montgomery County Police Department and their Work with People with Disabilities Work with Autism/IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities), Alzheimer's and Dementia – Officers Amy Stoughton and Kelly Cox, Special Operations Division, Autism/IDD, Alzheimer's, and Dementia Outreach Program

[Brochure: Autism, Intellectual, Developmental Disabilities Alzheimer's, Dementia Unit](#)

- Brochures are being translated into Spanish and Amharic.

This program began in 2005, partly in response to the growing number of police calls for service involving missing residents with autism/IDD, Alzheimer's, and Dementia. The program has continued to develop and today provides a "total approach" to issues that these residents and police encounter through Education, Outreach, Follow-up, Empowerment, and Response.

All Montgomery County recruits and officers receive training and education on ensuring positive, effective, and safe interactions between law enforcement and the Autism/IDD communities. The unit also works with caregivers and those with Autism/IDD on ways to ensure they are safe in the community. Regularly utilize "self-advocates," those with autism or other intellectual and developmental disabilities, to assist with our presentations.

Outreach efforts are quite extensive. Hold community events such as Spectacular Kids Night Out and Autism/IDD Night Out throughout the year. Conduct presentations within and outside of the County. Outreach aims to provide tools and resources that prepare individuals, caregivers, and the community for effective ways to ensure a safe, meaningful community.

Through the education of officers on ways to ensure positive and safe interactions with those who have autism/IDD, Alzheimer's, and dementia, they are confident in the ability of officers to provide an effective response to both general calls for service and calls for missing at-risk persons in the community. The Unit responds to calls every day, averaging 3 to 10 calls per

week. They have provided service to 800 families in 2025 so far. That is 200 more families than last year.

One of the program's main goals is to provide a platform for those who don't always have a voice. They empower their officers, individuals, caregivers, and the community through education and outreach. They incorporate the concerns and questions of those we interact with to develop dynamic curriculums and presentations. They utilize "self-advocates," those with autism or other intellectual and developmental disabilities, to assist in instruction for officers and community members.

They follow up with parents or caregivers after we receive notice of a call for service involving someone from the autism/IDD, Alzheimer's, or dementia community. We work with other county and state services that may be able to help. The MCPD Autism/IDD Wandering Safety Kit is provided to caregivers and contains wandering prevention tools, including window clings for the door and home and an MCPD safety t-shirt.

Officers are trained to always think Autism when responding to a call. There has been an increase in age and prevalence with Autistic individuals and co-occurring mental health concerns. Officers are also trained on how to deal with the circumstances when they receive a call that a child/adult with Autism has wandered from the home or school. After the individual has been located and taken home, the officer will follow-up with the family to check on the caregivers and the child/adult and to discuss safety tips in the home.

Most importantly they want the families to not wait to call 911 if they suspect the child or adult with Autism or IDD has wandered from the house. Some parents may be worried about their immigration status or that Child Protective Services will get involved but the goal is to find the child and bring them home safely. Parents should never wait to call 911 and should inform the dispatcher if their child has Autism or IDD. It is also important to let the dispatcher know if the child has been talking about something new or if there are bodies of water nearby as children with Autism can be drawn to water. The Outreach Team has [created a wandering 911 script that parents can use](#). The document can also be shared with neighbors.

If a person with autism has only been missing for 15 minutes, the search perimeter is much smaller than if they have been missing for 45 minutes to an hour. Officers dispatched will go to the home or the last place the child was seen. If the child can tolerate sensitivity, it is advised they wear some sort of bracelet. If the child cannot wear something on their wrist, Pathfinders for Autism has created [free personal wearable QR codes](#) that can be attached to shoestrings. When the child is found, the QR code can be scanned for information regarding that child. Families are advised to install cameras, alarms, extra locks – anything that would alert them that the child has wandered.

The Unit works closely with MCPS, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Adult Protective Services, CPS, Fire and Rescue Services, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration, Pathfinders for Autism, Down Syndrome Network, and Arc Montgomery County.

The Crisis Response Team (CRT), formerly known as the Crisis Intervention Team, program is a community partnership of law enforcement, mental health and addiction professionals, individuals who live with mental illness and/or addiction disorders, their families, and other advocates. It is an innovative first-responder model of police-based crisis intervention training to help persons with mental disorders and/or addictions access medical treatment rather than place them in the criminal justice system due to illness-related behaviors. It also promotes officer safety and the safety of the individual in crisis. The Team works alongside the DHHS clinicians with the most acute cases. A dedicated DHHS clinician is embedded into the Crisis

Response Team unit, whose focus centers on closing the gaps between public safety resources and the mental health system.

One hundred percent of sworn Montgomery County Police Officers are trained in Mental Health First Aid, while over three-fourths have received forty hours of training in Crisis Intervention. Training includes topics such as de-escalation and communication and education on different disorders. Officers treat the individual to control the situation as quickly and safely as possible.

Calls that are in progress, such as critical missing cases, work directly with the Autism/IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities), Alzheimer's and Dementia Team. They are seeing a significant increase in individuals who have Autism/IDD plus a behavioral or mental illness diagnosis.

CRT provides other resources and works with the Montgomery County Circuit Court's Problem-Solving Courts - the Adult Drug Court and Mental Health Court. It was reported that a Veterans Treatment Court would hopefully be coming on board soon.

MCPD has access to resources such as cameras and drones and they are able to utilize them quickly. If the family member calls to report that the child has been found before the team arrives, it is a great ending and not a waste of resources. Some individuals are hesitant to call.

The floor was opened to comments and questions.

- **How can residents receive the safety kit?** You can email Officer Laurie Reyes at Laurie.Reyes@montgomerycountymd.gov or Officer Amy Stoughton at Amy.Stoughton@montgomerycountymd.gov. An officer can deliver the safety kit to your house which also offers an opportunity for the child to engage with an officer who may respond during the wandering call. MCPD encourages getting to know your local officers.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the October 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the October 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. [Approved minutes are available on the Commission's website.](#)

Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Commission Members

Denise Isreal, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), reported that students, older adults 65+ and persons with disabilities can continue to ride Metrobus fare-free within Montgomery County, but only by tapping a valid Youth Cruiser SmarTrip, Senior SmarTrip, Reduced Fare SmarTrip or Metro Access SmarTrip card on the farebox. MCDOT will be participating in a County Executive Budget Forum at Leisure World as well as three events in December for students with disabilities where WMATA will provide discount cards and travel training.

Angela Luskey, Montgomery County Recreation (MCR), reported former County Councilmember Gabe Albornoz will be returning as Director of MCR next month. He is an advocate for people with disabilities. MCR is working to make a larger split between youth programs and adult programs to separate the ages. Angela also reported there will be a ballroom class for adults with Down Syndrome being offered at Leisure World in the future.

Next Meeting

The next full Commission Meeting is Wednesday December 10 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and will be held virtually via Zoom.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Attendance

Voting Members Present

- Azeb Adere
- Shameen Anthanio-Williams
- Jennifer Berzok
- Tonya Gilchrist
- Karen Goss
- Tria Gray
- Cindy LaBon
- Ricardo Lopez
- Jamila Michael-Sobratti
- Rebecca Murphy
- Deborah Rozell
- Teresa Villani
- John Whittle

Voting Members Absent

- Felicia Brannon
- Leslie Green Lyles
- Mary Simons
- Christopher Sinsheimer

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members Present

- Matthew Barkley, Department of General Services
- Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks
- Pat Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools
- Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission
- Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation
- Elizabeth Lang, Department of Libraries
- Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members Absent

- Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission
- Soumya Nukala, Office of Human Resources

Commission Staff Present

- Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, Community Outreach Manager
- Carly Clem, Staff Support, Program Specialist II

Other Aging & Disability Staff Present

- Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging & Disability Services
- Kim Mayo, Community Support Network

Public Attendees

- Kelsey Cabanaan
- Caitlin Lyon
- Alphael Wobil-Blankson
- Heather Turrell
- Crescila Deleon
- Akou Buamey
- Erica Lee

- Karen Morgret
- Kristina Sievers
- Rebecca Grayson
- Zilper Odhiambo
- Simonne McCants
- Juliana Owusu
- Madelyn Shenego
- Sudha Sudhaker
- Sue Hartung
- Ashley Hicks
- Marielle Therese Amigos
- Ava Smith, American Sign Language Interpreter
- Julie Miller, American Sign Language Interpreter

Guest Speakers

- Jade Gingerich, Executive Director, Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, Maryland Department of Disabilities
- Officer Amy Stoughton, Special Operations Division, Autism/IDD, Alzheimer's/Dementia Outreach Program, Montgomery County Police Department
- Officer Kelly Cox, Montgomery County Police Department