



Commission on People with Disabilities

October 8, 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](#)

Join by telephone: *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.*

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Agenda

6:00 Call to Order & Approval of September 2025 Meeting Minutes – *Tonya Gilchrist, Chair*

6:10 Montgomery County Hiring Initiatives for People with Disabilities – *David P. Rice Jr. Manager, Recruitment and Selection Division, Montgomery County Office of Human Resources, and Soumya Nukala, Human Resources Specialist III (H.I.R.E), Office of Human Resources, Montgomery County Government (MCG)*

6:40 Establish Two Priorities for FY 27 County Operating Budget – *Please review Draft next page*

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 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.



Commission on People with Disabilities

Meeting with Montgomery County Council HHS Committee

Top Policy issues October 22, 2025 - Tony Gilchrist, Chair Draft 4 for 10/8 meeting

Promote Greater Community Engagement and Inclusion of All People who have a Disability

- Promote Greater Employment Opportunities for people with disabilities who want to work of all ages and who have all types of disabilities. OHR should continue to promote the Hiring preference for Veterans, Disabled Veterans and People with Disabilities and the County's non-competitive hiring initiative. At the same time, work with DORS and WorkSource Montgomery to promote hiring in the private and public sectors.
- Encourage MCPS to implement more one on one family/student assessments of students who are marginalized or of immigrant populations in special education to access needed programs and resources. Promote avenues for greater parent advocacy.
- Continue to support the annual Development Disability supplement as it remains a cornerstone for providers who receive funding for services from the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) enabling them to sustain quality services and supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). This funding ensures the provider community can navigate cost disparities and workforce challenges of recruiting and retaining Direct Support Professionals while meeting the evolving needs of the people they serve. The DDA FY 26 COLA rate adjustment for this year did not fully cover the extra cost of inflation. The DD supplement increases do not fully cover the cost of annual expansion of hundreds of new people who are newly admitted into services DD providers in the County, including Transitioning Youth who graduate from MCPS. DDA funding reductions have impacted providers, and it is not known how Medicaid will play out. Depending on what happens with Medicaid, DDA could have a major challenge supporting individuals with IDD.
- Increase funding of Respite and Caregiver Supports. Respite care is occasional, short-term temporary physical and emotional relief for families with adults with functional disabilities, children or adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, children with challenging behaviors, and frail seniors ages 60+. Respite care can be used in many locations, including the family home, community and recreational programs, camps, senior day programs and approved respite facilities Caregiver supports promote community engagement and include transportation, in-community and in-home support, and programs and services for older adults and people with disabilities.

Promote Greater Enforcement of Disability Laws: Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance, Fair Housing Act

- Transportation – sidewalks/street design to ensure equal access and equity for people with disabilities. Minimize or eliminate designated bike lanes, monitor state designs that are confusing to the public such as Old Georgetown Road and Rock Spring Drive. Encourage taxi drivers to drive accessible vehicles on a regular full-time basis. Have Police enforce use of accessible parking spaces and placard use.
- Funding for new and innovative assistive listening devices such as Auracast broadcast audio which is a new Bluetooth capability to enhance hearing accessibility.
- Promote programs that increase the amount of accessible and affordable housing – Such as: Design for Life Montgomery, encourage the building and renovation of accessible homes. Seek legislation for the County to adopt the Prince Georges Universal design Bill CB-085-2024 AN ACT CONCERNING UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR HOUSING - REVISIONS generally regarding Universal Design elements for certain newly constructed residential homes.
- Implementation of property tax credit for people with a disability that is in Montgomery County Code, **ARTICLE X. PROPERTY TAX CREDIT** [ARTICLE X. PROPERTY TAX CREDITS](#) **Sec. 52-84. Real property tax credits for permanently and totally disabled homeowners.**

Lastly, it is critical for Boards, Committees and Commissions (BCC) have commissioners appointed in a timely manner so that they can be most effective and also respecting the volunteer service of community members who serve. We ask that the County ensure proper staffing for the County Executive's Office for timely recruitment and appointments of BCC members.



Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities October 8, 2025 – Meeting Minutes

Meeting Location

Held virtually via Zoom.

Call To Order

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the September 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the September 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written.

[Approved minutes are available on the Commission's website.](#)

Meeting Minutes Agenda Items

1. Montgomery County Hiring Initiatives for People with Disabilities

- [Hiring Preference for People with Disabilities, Veterans, and Veterans with Disabilities](#)
- [Non-Competitive Hiring Process for People with Disabilities](#)

David's role as the Recruitment and Selection Division is responsible for all Montgomery County Government (MCG) jobs outside of public safety (police, fire, etc.) which has their own recruitment process.

Prior to working for MCG, David worked at the National Institute of Health where he was able to increase the number of employees with disabilities from 5% to 14%. His overall goal is to increase the number of employees with disabilities to 25%, or 1 out of every 4 individuals to meet the national standard.

The Office of Human Resources (OHR) has a meeting every Monday and employment of persons with disabilities is always on the agenda. They discuss how to find more jobs for people with disabilities, how to remove bias and misconceptions of people with disabilities and the barriers of conceptualizing that one disability is the same for all people with disabilities. David is passionate about finding meaningful jobs for individuals with disabilities.

Soumya is the Montgomery County Liaison for the Project Search workplace training program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. She coordinates and liaises with that team to provide opportunities across the country. There are ten interns for this year's Project Search cohort, and they will be interning until June 2026. There is an initiative to make sure Project Search gets amplified in front of more departments and divisions.

For the non-competitive appointment of people with disabilities to County merit positions, a person with a disability can upload their resume into an online database. To be eligible, the person must a) have confirmed documentation of their disability uploaded with their resume/application, and b) Be minimally qualified for the role. Their resume is then reviewed

by an OHR recruiting team and shared at various staff meetings with departments to discuss upcoming jobs that could be a potential match. Hiring managers can choose to interview the individual directly without having the ad posted. If the hiring manager thinks it is a good fit, then the OHR Director will approve the non-competitive hire, and the rest of the process continues in terms of clearing contingencies for the role and paperwork. The online database program is currently in the pilot phase and will be shared in January when it is official.

The biggest difference in OHR is proactive recruitment versus reactive recruitment. Proactive recruitment is before the job is even created. If there is a vacancy in the pipeline, OHR can provide the hiring manager with qualified resumes rather than going through the process of posting a job. David reported that hiring in the County is becoming very competitive with each job listing receiving between 300 to 500 applicants.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- a. Does OHR use artificial intelligence (AI) to review resumes? There is a human being reviewing every single application. OHR does use a screening tool of yes or no questions in order to filter through applications. There is a fail-safe spot check on 10% of the screenings to ensure it is working properly.
- b. Is the hiring preference for people of all types of disabilities? It covers all disabilities across the board as verified by the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- c. Is there data that shows the hiring preference has helped to improve the employment rate of people with disabilities? David was not able to get data in advance of the meeting. There are three hiring preferences currently – veterans, veterans with disabilities and people with disabilities. The hiring manager is sent a list of qualified individuals prior to the job being listed and per regulations the hiring manager must consider those individuals first. If the hiring manager wants to bypass that system, they must meet with David to discuss the reason for bypassing. Once a bypass is approved for objective reasons, the job listing becomes available for everyone. David shared examples where a hiring manager did not want to hire the person with a disability as they were not sure the individual could write appropriately so David suggested asking the individual for a writing sample.
- d. Does OHR have data regarding the number of employees that have disclosed that they have a disability? Currently the County does not collect that data. The federal government had a form that was required to be filled out by employees. Betsy reported that the County was tracking employees hired through OHR's hiring preferences up until 2019. At that point approximately 200 veterans and 12 veterans with disabilities were hired. She noted that this Commission worked with OHR in to draft the legislation for the hiring preference for veterans, veterans with disabilities and people with disabilities which was enacted in 2010. The Commission also worked with OHR to draft the Charter amendment for the non-competitive hiring process for persons with disabilities that was voted into law by residents in 2012. Betsy reported that the County used to survey all employees once a year asking if the employee had a disability and if yes, what type of disability.
- e. What incentives does the County offer in terms of increasing the numbers of employees with disabilities? One way is through education to dispel the myth around disability employment and create more awareness. Individuals hired by the County after their Project Search internships become live models and can be used to show other departments a success story. OHR is having focused conversations with departments and agencies who are actively considering hiring people with disabilities. The Project Search program was impacted by the government shutdown and the National Institute of Health (NIH). The

County has not been impacted. There were seven interns in the last Project Search cohort and this year there are 10 interns. OHR hopes to continue increasing that number over the years.

- f. Mital Gajjar, Commission for Women, reported CW is very passionate about spreading awareness during Disability Employment Month. Does OHR provide job coaching? Currently OHR does not due to resources and budget. Mentorship can be free but there is a cost associated with job coaching. David received mentorship during his career with NIH and is working to bring the mentorship piece to OHR.
- g. Rachel Solomon, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), is working with OHR to increase the number of Project Search interns for their department. Is OHR able to provide support to assist with decreasing bias at the worksite or assistance to support individuals once they have been hired? David has had multiple conversations with site leads about informal coaching of supervisors working directly with interns. He will be hosting a brainstorming session with supervisors to discuss best practices and how to avoid certain biases as they work with interns. David is also having conversations with M-NCPPC about how to improve situations for interns that are onsite at various locations.
- h. Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging & Disability Services (ADS), reported ADS hosts an intern during every Project Search cohort. They are currently in the process of onboarding the new Project Search intern and working to bring in other interns from Project Search. ADS educates other departments about hiring individuals with disabilities.

2. Establish Two Priorities for FY 27 County Operating Budget

Tonya reviewed the Commission's draft priorities for the FY27 County Operating Budget. The final document will be presented to the County Council Health & Human Services Committee on October 22.

A motion was made to approve the priorities as written. The motion was seconded. The floor was open for discussion.

- a. Rebecca Murphy, Commissioner, is skeptical about individuals with vision impairments not being able to navigate bike infrastructure. There may be a pathway for both to co-exist. There are other items that could be addressed versus eliminating bike lanes such as improving Ride On service, making bus stops more accessible, and adopting a Complete Street Design approach.
- b. Cindy Labon, Commissioner, reported that the American Council of the Blind has provided input to the County on issues regarding bike lanes and floating bus stops and conducted several walk-throughs. The biggest issues are bike lanes and signage for the bus stops, which are not accessible. ACB also does not support floating bus stops as there is no consistency in their design. Cindy noted that many Audible Pedestrian Signals are not functioning. She also noted that her guide dog would not cross at a crosswalk that was painted green instead of white. It was suggested that these issues become a permanent agenda item or a task force established to address them.

A motion was made to accept the priorities with an amendment to the study of floating bus stops and elimination of new floating bus stops. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the priorities were unanimously approved with the amendment.

3. Updates – Commissioners and Ex-Officio Members

- a. Jamila Michael-Sobratti, Vice-Chair, reported [House Bill 707 / Senate Bill 618 - Vehicle Laws - Licenses, Identification Cards, and Moped Operator's Permits - Notation of](#)

[Nonapparent Disability \(Eric's ID Law\)](#) passed the Maryland General Assembly last week and is now effective throughout the entire state of Maryland. Under House Bill 707 / Senate Bill 618, Marylanders with hidden disabilities, such as developmental and intellectual disabilities, may voluntarily add a butterfly symbol on their driver's license, ID card or moped permit. The optional designation is free and aims to help first responders and others recognize individuals who may have communication challenges or need accommodations that are not immediately visible. [Adding or removing the hidden disability symbol](#) is free; however, if you are completing another MVA transactions, such as renewing a driver's license, those fees will still apply. Marylanders can update their hidden disability designation from their phone or computer via their online myMVA account, any 24/7 self-service kiosks, or an in-person appointment at any of the 24 statewide MVA branches.

- b. Matthew Barkley, ADA Title II Compliance Manager, Department of General Services, reported that this October is the 80th anniversary of Disability Employment Awareness Month. Internally, Montgomery County Government is creating ADA liaisons for each department that will work to provide accommodations to individuals with disabilities that are interacting with the County. DGS is also working to establish a group for employees with disabilities. DGS is working to expand on Disability Mentoring Day and will be partnering with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to provide job shadowing opportunities for students with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that in 2024, the employment rate for individuals without disabilities was 65.5% and the employment rate for individuals with disabilities was 22.7%.
- c. Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported that HOC funding has been pre-paid through November. If the government shutdown continues, HOC will not be able to pay landlords. HOC has issued notices to landlords asking them not to vacate units if this happens. Rebecca reported a draft document has been viewed from the current administration that any individual with or without a disability would be limited to using HOC programs for two years. Inspections of medical expenses and of units/buildings have been pushed back to November 2026 or will not occur at all. There is a possibility that the family self-sufficient vouchers and the emergency vouchers, which are specifically for individuals with disabilities, will be eliminated.
- d. Shameen Anthanio-Williams, Commissioner, is planning a resource for veterans. She also suggested Commissioners review the resources available at the [DORS Workforce Technology Center](#).
- e. Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, suggested that the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) receive training for laws regarding service animals. If an individual with a service animal is denied service, they are to call the police to file a complaint. In her experience the responding officers do not know the law. It was suggested the Commission invite MCPD to a future meeting. Jamila reported that [MCPD Crisis Intervention Team \(CIT\)](#) is training new officers coming on board. The CIT 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.

Next Meeting

The Steering Committee Meeting will be held next Wednesday October 15 from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. and will be held virtually via Zoom.

The next full Commission Meeting is Wednesday November 12 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and will be held virtually via Zoom.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Attendance

Voting Members Present

- Shameen Anthanio-Williams
- Jennifer Berzok
- Tonya Gilchrist
- Karen Goss
- Tria Gray
- Leslie Green Lyles
- Cindy LaBon
- Jamila Michael-Sobratti
- Rebecca Murphy
- Deborah Rozell
- Teresa Villani
- John Whittle

Voting Members Absent

- Azeb Adere
- Felicia Brannon
- Ricardo Lopez
- Mary Simons
- Christopher Sinsheimer

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members Present

- Matthew Barkley, Department of General Services
- Pat Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools
- Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission
- Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission
- Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation
- Soumya Nukala, Office of Human Resources

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members Absent

- Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks
- Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation

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

- Mital Gajjar
- Aileen Villarroel
- Karen Morgret
- Rachel Solomon
- Stacey Ibekweh
- Sammi Hampton

Guest Speakers

- David P. Rice, Jr., Manager, Recruitment and Selection Division, Montgomery County Office of Human Resources
- Soumya Nukala, Human Resources Specialist III (H.I.R.E), Office of Human Resources