



**Commission on People with Disabilities**  
**February 11, 2026 - 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 January 2026 Meeting Minutes – Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**
- 6:10 Gilchrist Immigration Resource Center Services – Julien Labiche, Program Manager**
- 6:45 Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) Reorganization of Special Education Services – Patricia Cochrane, Supervisor, [MCPS Transition Services](#)**
- 7:00 The Organization of Commission Workgroups or Committees – Housing, Transportation, Monitoring of County Enforcement of Disability Rights Laws – Tonya Gilchrist - See Next Page for Top FY 27 Priorities**
- 7:20 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 with Montgomery County Council HHS Committee

Top Policy Issues October 22, 2025

Tony Gilchrist, Chair

### **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 support 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+. Caregiver supports promotes community engagement.

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

- Transportation – Designated bike lanes and floating bus stops can present specific barriers, confusion, and danger to people who have low vision, blindness, hearing loss, mobility limitations or intellectual disabilities. Because there is not one standard design for floating bus stops, the issue should be studied for changes leading to consistency. Minimize or eliminate designated bike lanes and better monitoring of those installed by the state as they are confusing to the public such as Old Georgetown Road and Rock Spring Drive. Provide incentives to taxi drivers to drive accessible vehicles on a regular full-time basis. Greater police enforcement of accessible parking spaces/placards.
- 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 February 11, 2026 – Meeting Minutes

### Meeting Location

Held virtually via Zoom.

### Call To Order

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, called the meeting to order.

### Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2026 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the January 2026 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. [Approved minutes are available on the Commission's website.](#)

### Meeting Agenda Items

#### 1. Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) Reorganization of Special Education Services – Patricia Cochrane, Supervisor, [MCPS Transition Services](#)

Patricia reviewed a PowerPoint presentation – [FY27 Operating Budget: Special Education](#)

View [MCPS' Superintendent's Recommended Special Education Staffing Plan Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget](#)

Patricia presented an update on the reorganization of MCPS special education services, highlighting the addition of 153 special education resource teachers for elementary schools and changes to the current cross-functional teams. In June 2025, several Special Education supervisor positions were eliminated. Some were converted into Special Education Coordinator positions with the Cross Functional Teams. In December 2025, seven additional special education supervisor positions were eliminated, including Autism, Transition, Speech, and others. The current reorganization plan is for Special Education to have four directors (there are currently two) and four supervisors (currently nine).

Patricia presented on MCPS's support for non-English speaking students and families, highlighting bilingual assessment teams, language assistance programs, and family engagement specialists. She discussed upcoming events like a winter resource fair and transition services.

The floor was opened for comments and questions.

- The federal government is reducing funding for Medicaid. There are proposed budget cuts for the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration. Now there are proposed budget cuts for transitioning services within MCPS. This will have a huge impact on students with disabilities transitioning out of the school system who will have little to no transitional supports. Patricia agreed and reported that the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services has also seen a significant reduction in funding as well. She is confident the leadership left within Special Education Services is strong and committed to the process. Staff work with students to get them into career and education programs to ensure they are leaving the school system with good skills, licenses and certificates. They also work on Maryland State Department of Education graduation endorsements.

- It was asked if principals and Family Engagement Specialists know about growing immigrant populations in Silver Spring. Azeb Adere, Commissioner, was invited to give presentations at several schools about the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and the Family Engagement Specialist at those schools need to be able to connect well with families. Patricia said most Family Engagement Specialists are new to the system and it is the schools' first time having one. She suggested engaging with them to build relationships.

## 2. Gilchrist Immigration Resource Center Services – Julien Labiche, Program Manager

Julien reviewed a PowerPoint presentation – [Overview of Gilchrist Immigration Resource Center Services](#)

Visit the [Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center](#) website

The Gilchrist Center is the main gateway to success for thousands of immigrants who come to Montgomery County with limited financial resources. The most common request is from individuals who want to learn English. The free classes are the first step to learning English for many who could not otherwise afford to pay for private lessons. Computer classes allow some of our neighbors in need to get promotions at work that allow them to house and feed their families. Classes at the Gilchrist Center start many on the path to citizenship. The Center's information and referral staff connect our new neighbors with the services they need to thrive.

Julien explained the role of the Gilchrist Center, highlighting its function as an information hub for newcomers and residents in Montgomery County. The center provides resources and assistance in navigating services such as housing, utilities, legal, and immigration matters, while also offering English and computer classes. Julien clarified that the center does not provide direct services but helps connect individuals to available resources and organizations. Partnerships with agencies like the Montgomery County Bar Foundation, Department of Health and Human Services, and Montgomery College enable the center to offer legal clinics, benefit application assistance, and educational programs.

The floor was opened to questions.

- Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported the County previously had 300 foreign born individuals who were Deaf and illiterate in their home language. At the time, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) was working with them to provide them needed training to work. The County has a history of providing services to immigrant populations who have disabilities.
- Does the Center work with immigrants who have disabilities? Yes, there are immigrants with disabilities that attend classes and need reasonable accommodations.
- Cindy LaBon, Commissioner, said she frequently runs into individuals who are blind or low vision and who speak other languages that do not know where to go. She found the presentation very helpful and will share it with others.
- Julien asked the Commissioners to help spread the word about what the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center has to offer and increase their reach into the community.

## 3. Discussion on Town of Poolesville – Pool Bubble Project

The Town of Poolesville Equal Access Committee is testifying before the County Council asking for funds to convert the existing Sarah E. Auer outdoor pool to a year-round facility using a "Pool Bubble". The Committee contacted Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services to identify disability organizations that would be interested in supporting this project. Commissioners were asked to discuss and decide if they wanted to vote and write a letter of support for funding. The Sarah E. Auer outdoor pool is a public pool that is managed by the Department of Recreation. Betsy reported the Town of Poolesville has 343 veterans and the Commission on Veterans Affairs

will also be discussing supporting this project. It was asked if the current pool facility has accessibility and ample parking. It was noted that the closest indoor pool in Germantown seems to be closed consistently to the public due to swim meets. It was suggested that the Commission could send a letter of support stating indicating support would only be given if the pool had accessibility and parking. Patricia reported Poolesville High School students would benefit from having a year-round pool as it is harder for kids to access activities in that area. Betsy reported the budget hearing will be held this week.

#### **4. The Organization of Commission Workgroups or Committees – Housing, Transportation, Monitoring of County Enforcement of Disability Rights Laws**

The Housing Workgroup had previously discussed writing a letter to the Housing Opportunities Commission. Due to lack of time, further discussions on organizing Commission workgroups or committees will occur during the Steering Committee next week.

#### **5. Chair Report**

Tonya reported the Commission sent a letter of support for FY26 funding respite services to the Council County. The Commission also sent a letter to the County Council regarding the DMV Moves project, transportation and pedestrian safety issues, bike lanes and floating bus stops.

Developmental Disabilities Day for the Maryland General Assembly will be held on February 18. Independent Living Day will be held on February 26.

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

Tabled due to time constraints.

#### **Next Meeting**

The next full Commission Meeting is Wednesday March 11, 2026 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**

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

**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

**Commission Staff Present**

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

**Other County Staff Present**

- Mansi Gonsalia, Legislative Analyst, County Council
- Kim Mayo, Administrator, Community Support Network
- Ijeoma Oji, Chief of Strategic Planning, Performance & Communications, Department of General Services,

**Public Attendees**

- Judy Cain, Sign Language Interpreter
- Lyn Eaton, Sign Language Interpreter
- Seth Morgan, former Chair
- Francie Gilman, former Commissioner
- Karen Morgret, Treatment & Learning Centers

**Guest Speakers**

- Julien Labiche, Program Manager, Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center