



**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities  
Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary – February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Larry Bram, Co-Chair • Karen Morgret, Co-Chair**

**Welcome, Introductions and Review of January 2020 Minutes**

Minutes were approved as written. Minutes from past meetings can be found online at:

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/CPWD/CPWDIndex.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/CPWD/CPWDIndex.html), under the tab Developmental Disability Advisory Committee.

**Input – Sensory Friendly Initiative for County – Leslie Rubin, Senior Legislative Analyst, Office of Legislative Oversight, Montgomery County Council**

The mission of the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) is to provide accurate information, analysis, and independent findings and recommendations that help the County Council fulfill its legislative oversight function. Legislative oversight is the process by which a legislative body monitors the performance of publicly-funded activities and applies this knowledge to its primary functions of enacting laws, establishing public policy, approving budgets, and raising revenues.

OLO receives its assignments from the nine elected members of the County Council, which annually adopt a Council Resolution that sets forth the Work Program for the office. For each assignment, OLO prepares a written report that provides information. These reports are publicly released by the Council and are available online. Reports include recommendations that are generally specific to how the Council or County Executive can implement laws, regulations, policies, and programs for these assignments. Included in the Fiscal Year 2020 Work Program of the OLO is a request to study sensory friendly and Autism friendly designation:

<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/DDAC/FY20WorkProgramandSignedResolution.pdf>.

Leslie is currently drafting the report and is reviewing Autism and how Autism impacts individuals, sensory and sensory-processing issues, the various organizations that designate businesses or places as Autism or sensory friendly, and the criteria used to obtain those designations. There is no single standard used. Each organization has determined their own criteria. Some charge a fee while others do not. For example, The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at the University of Southern Florida does not charge a fee. Mesa, Arizona was recently designated as the first Autism certified city in the United States by an organization called International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). Marc Garcia, Visit Mesa's CEO, ignited the effort after his 6-year-old son's Autism diagnosis. His initial idea was to make Mesa Autism friendly in the context of tourism. In working with the tourism community, all sorts of businesses jumped on the bandwagon. IBCCES decided to designate Mesa as an Autism friendly certified city due to the magnitude of businesses and organizations that received certification. More information:

[https://ibcces.org/blog/2019/11/18/mesa\\_first\\_autism\\_certified\\_city/](https://ibcces.org/blog/2019/11/18/mesa_first_autism_certified_city/).

Beth Shuman, Senior Legislative Aide, Office of Councilmember Gabe Alborno, reported Councilmember Alborno suggested that this proposal be modeled in the same context as the County's age-friendly initiative which is designed to enhance the County as a wonderfully diverse *Community for a Lifetime* -- a place where all residents can age, thrive to their full potential, and contribute as a powerful resource in making our County a better, stronger, more inclusive community for everyone. More information:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/age-friendly.html>. Betsy asked what the difference in criterias between age-friendly and disability friendly/universal access. Universal access is a way to approach all services in the County. If a restaurant were to be designated as age-friendly most likely it would meet the same criteria as disability friendly/ universal accessible. Betsy said the Commission used to designate businesses as disability-

friendly and had stickers placed in their store windows. The sticker did not indicate what type of accessibility was being offered (bathrooms, sign language interpreter, etc).

Leslie reported there are already a number of existing places and resources in the County that would be considered sensory friendly. For example, the Strathmore Music Center offers sensory friendly performances and Montgomery County Public Libraries offer sensory friendly story times. Various movie theaters in the county offer designated sensory friendly movie times. Leslie asked for general input from this Committee on Autism and sensory designation or information related to those disabilities. She added her recommendations to the Council will include more than the Council's involvement and will include the Executive Branch in order to talk with the business and non-profit community.

Susan Hartung, Parent, would like to see changes made within government agencies such as the Department of Recreation. There are very few times the pools are available to those with sensory disabilities and those times fill up quickly. Also, while the movie theaters have done a great job of offering sensory friendly movie times, they tend to be only one time on a weekend and it should be made available more often. She suggested having a calendar for individuals to find various activities and so activities will not conflict at the same times. Jenn Lynn, Upcounty Community Resources (UCR), said UCR offers an online calendar of therapeutic and disability-friendly events and programs. Agencies are able to upload their own listings.

<https://www.calendarwiz.com/calendars/calendar.php?crd=ucr&wform=1&jsenabled=1&winh=788&winw=1361&inifr=false>

Jenn Lynn asked what the qualifications are to become sensory friendly and if it's for only certain types of agencies like recreation or does it extend to establishments like restaurants and banks. Leslie explained that the type of places can range from restaurants to stores to zoos. Designations vary with some places having a certain time frame for sensory friendly activities while others are sensory friendly at all times. Different places may provide sensory friendly toolkits that include noise canceling headphones, fidgets, and weighted lap blankets. There are several sports venues and large arenas that are now being designated as sensory friendly by offering these toolkits. There is also an airport that has developed a sensory friendly quiet room. The criteria are very broad.

It was suggested that an education component be included in the report recommendations so that the community at large can understand the need for sensory friendly areas, times or activities. There should also be some benefit to the business for making these adaptations. Leslie said that all of the major organizations that provide designations include staff training as a big component. The organizations that do the designation come up with their own curriculum. Training includes forward-facing staff who interact with the public and people who have Autism or sensory issues. Businesses can include information on their website to state that they are certified.

It was asked if businesses could display a sign in their window that shows their designation. It was also suggested that businesses explain what sensory friendly means so the general public understands. For example, a restaurant might include something on their menu.

It was suggested that family gender neutral bathrooms be a minimum requirement in order to receive a designation. Leslie said from her research most organizations emphasize changes that do not have a major infrastructure impact on the business. It was noted that high powered hand dryers are an issue for people with sensory issues as well as automatic toilet flushers. Someone noted that they were in Seattle at an establishment that had many gender neutral bathrooms with one central area to wash your hands. It was noted that current legislation [Maryland General Assembly HB0010 – Public Buildings – Changing Facilities – Personal Care for Adults](#) would require, except under certain circumstances, that changing facilities suitable for changing the diaper of a child and providing personal care for an adult be installed in certain public restrooms in certain public buildings by October 1, 2020.

Leslie has reached out to the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCCC) but has not heard back from them yet. She asked for anyone with connection to MCCCC to please reach out to them about this. It was suggested that the Better Business Bureau could designate businesses as sensory friendly. The online business listings on Yelp could also include information about sensory friendly designations. Leslie agreed that different

levels of ratings or a scale of accessibility is a good idea. The scale could include lighting, type of bathrooms available, and decibel level. Stores could offer a time on the weekend for sensory friendly shopping by dimming the lights, not making overhead announcements and not playing music. Those are easy changes to make that do not require any money. It was noted that larger chains such as Target most likely would not be able to offer designated times, but smaller businesses could.

It was suggested Leslie receive input from people who have Autism or sensory disabilities. Betsy also indicated that a sensory disability typically refers to people who are blind, low vision, deaf or hard of hearing. Would this as titled also apply to loudness of noise say for blind pedestrians and the audible pedestrian signals?

Another suggestion was making emergency lighting that is not strobe lights which can cause seizures in some people. Betsy noted that she had two Commissioners serving at the same time – one who needed low light due to seizures and one who needed more light due to low vision. Leslie said that is something to keep in mind that one option may be helpful for one person while it may be unhelpful for another person. There is a spectrum.

It was asked if the County was planning to develop or renovate any buildings or parks in the near future that could be designed to incorporate sensory friendly components. It was noted that the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has set aside funding to renovate schools and that could be a good place to start. Leslie said MCPS will definitely be part of the discussion. She added that developing narratives and photos to help individuals see what a place will look like before visiting is also an option.

It was suggested that County parks such as Hadley's Park on Falls Road set aside time for sensory-friendly play or events one day a month or one day a week. It was also suggested that the Mattie J.T. Stepanek Park offer the same, but that park is managed by the City of Rockville. Committee members were encouraged to visit the Clemyjontri Park in McClean, Virginia, an accessible playground for all types of disabilities, including sensory and developmental disabilities: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/clemyjontri>.

Leslie encouraged Committee members to contact her with further feedback and input. She anticipates finalizing her report within the next few weeks. At this point she cannot recommend one designating organization over another. She is including recommendations the Executive Branch can make with their own agencies such as within the Department of Recreation. Leslie added she is meeting with Montgomery Parks to discuss this initiative. Larry asked if this Committee could review the draft. Leslie said while reports are typically not made public prior to the Council's review, she may ask this Committee for input beforehand.

**L. Michael Bryan, Regional Deputy Director, DDA Southern Maryland Regional Office**

Waiting List Update – February 2020: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/DDAC/DDAWaitListFeb2020.pdf>

It was asked if the waiting list number has dropped as more individuals are moving into the Family Support Waiver. Michael said the number reported on the waiting list reflects those that are active. It was asked how many on the wait list were not getting services. Michael will provide that information to Betsy Luecking, Staff, to share later.

It was asked why there are 14 TYs on the waiver but they have no provider. It could be a number of reasons including that the individual's needs may exceed the providers capacity. Susan Hartung said the rate study issue has providers concerned about taking on challenging individuals that they may lose money on. It is a possibility that one of these 14 individuals will not get a provider, will be left unattended and will get hurt. It was asked how the TY17 and TY18 numbers compare to the TY20 and TY21 numbers. Michael said he does not recall a year where every single TY was placed. It was noted that providers used to be able to discuss individual cases in order to assess available services and figure out which provider could serve that individual. There also used to be a staff person that would make individual calls to every provider to discuss individual TY cases and that does not happen anymore.

The Transition Workgroup has discussed that providers used to have triage meetings to discuss individual's who needed to be placed and DDA would be there as well to assist with additional resources if needed. With the

ongoing rate study and transformation, those meetings have not been taken place and there may be privacy issues. Beth would like more information about the triage meetings to share with Councilmember Alborno. She would like to know why it was stopped if it was so beneficial. One reason was potentially a lack of confidentiality as well as concern from parents who were not involved in the placement discussions. There was an element of choice being taken away because meetings were essentially limiting choices. The downside is that those individuals may not be placed with a provider. Sarah O'Neill, MMARS, said there is a county in central Maryland that has a TY match day where all the providers and CCS agencies get together to make placements. It has been discussed that this is not a person-centered approach, but the TYs get placed. Montgomery County HHS Community Support Network (CSN) used to have one staff person focused on TYs, but that staffperson is no longer with CSN.

Self-direction is an option, but there is no education on how to self-direct and individuals are still purchasing services. From a CCS perspective, person-centered planning (PCP) enables the CCS to advocate more for needed services whereas before it had been much more structured and difficult to receive additional services. It was noted how hard it can be to navigate the system, especially if English is not your first language or if you do not have much of an education. The Transition Workgroup's proposal will help with that.

Susan reported West Virginia Governor Jim Justice has asked their Department of Health and Human Resources to develop options for ending their waitlist. She asked for Maryland Governor Larry Hogan to do the same. Michael said more people are added to the Family Support waiver every quarter so progress is being made.

It was asked if families who are using the Family Support waivers are receiving provider support. It was also asked if DDA is processing applications for new service providers. Michael said DDA accepts many applications, but it does take time to become a qualified provider or for that provider to fully understand the services and supports that are needed. DDA is working to create capacity. Maryland never had Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded (ICF/MR) in the community. Maryland chose instead to have institutions and when those were closed there was not the capacity in the community to take those individuals.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, suggested that Michael share these questions and concerns with Nicholas Burton, recently hired SMRO Regional Director. Nicholas will be speaking about employment issues at the March DDAC Meeting and may be able to address these questions as well.

### **Legislation Update – Karen Morgret**

Developmental Disabilities Day is this Wednesday, February 12<sup>th</sup> in Annapolis.

Handout: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/DDAC/SB796DDAProgramChanges.pdf>

SB796 / HB984 – Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) – Program Changes and Required Reports

To address the concerns, Senator Guy Guzzone and Delegate Bonnie Cullison have introduced legislation that:

- Delays implementation of the new service definitions and LTSS to July 1, 2021;
- Requires DDA to ensure that people and providers are not adversely impacted;
- Ensures that people who take action within 30 days to appeal a loss of Medicaid eligibility, maintain their services during the appeal process; and
- Requires a number of reports from DDA to the General Assembly to ensure that the system, rates, communication, back up plans and training are all in place in order to facilitate a smooth transition in which neither people with developmental disabilities nor providers are hurt.

Beth reported Councilmember Alborno is working to get support from all the Councilmembers for these bills. Councilmember Alborno is planning to testify in Annapolis on March 6. There have been meetings with Susan Hartung and Michael Greenberg to develop a plan on how everyone will work together.

### **Update – Early Identification Initiative – Larry Bram**

The County Council's HHS Committee will be hosting a worksession on Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in the Council Office Building 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room to discuss the early identification initiative. Larry reported approximately one-quarter of Montgomery County pediatricians are using the electronic system in their offices. Councilmember Albornoz has been very supportive and has discussed adopting this initiative within HHS. MCPS and Infants & Toddlers (I&T) will be at the worksession.

CHADIS, the company that designed the system the initiative is using, has added a button that enables a pediatrician to send a report to I&T immediately if a child receives a positive during the questionnaire process. The report is only sent to I&T with permission from the parent(s). That option is available now throughout the country, not just in Montgomery County. Parents have the option to fill out the questionnaire online prior to the appointment or in the waiting room via tablet before meeting with their pediatrician. The screening itself is for delays and is meant to identify a delay not meant to diagnose a disability

I&T stated that within the past year the number of referrals has increased. It was originally thought to include a developmental disability psychologist in the budget for this initiative, but the thinking has changed to adding an intake person to do the assessments.

### **Pedestrian, Bicycle, Scooter Safety Recommendations for County – Larry Bram**

A member of the disability community, Brett Badin, was killed trying to cross Rockville Pike near its intersection at Wootton Parkway/1<sup>st</sup> Street on the evening of Thursday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. There was a Rally for Safe Streets on Saturday in remembrance of Brett and Michael Gamboa, another pedestrian who was killed trying to cross Rockville Pike. Susan said the quality of her children's lives depends on the risks you are willing to take, and there have been some serious consequences. Brett had an amazing life and that is something to celebrate and not judge. Kids with and without disabilities make mistakes all the time. The growth of downtown Rockville and housing developments throughout the county has contributed to more pedestrian traffic. It was noted that Ride On bus stops are located in the middle section of the sidewalk and not a crosswalk. It was also noted that there is very heavy pedestrian traffic when Richard Montgomery High School is dismissed in the afternoons. Pedestrian traffic will continue to increase with the opening of Main Street near Rockville Town Center, a residential complex of 70 apartments with 25% set aside for persons with disabilities.

One Committee member attended the Montgomery County Council Town Hall on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 held at Wheaton High School. The Council wants to hear from its residents about specific intersections, sidewalks, and other issues. Rockville has a mix of state-owned and county-owned streets. It was stated at the town hall that Rockville Pike is a state-owned street. SHA was present at the town hall. Councilmembers said education is needed. It was asked at the townhall if the County has any pedestrian safety guidelines. It was suggested that there be pedestrian safety training, including an online web-based training. Drivers also need to be educated on the disability community to raise awareness.

### **Respectfully Submitted,**

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist  
Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

### **Next Meeting**

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Meeting Room, Rockville, MD 20850