



COMMISSION ON AGING

Montgomery County Commission on Aging FY19 Budget Statement

April 12, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Aging (COA) believes that Montgomery County continues to make progress as a *Community for a Lifetime* for all its residents. We appreciate the County Executive's and the County Council's desire to treat all county residents with dignity and respect, and to identify solutions to the challenges faced by older adults who are low income or otherwise vulnerable. This is evidenced by the provision of critical services and programs for both vital and vulnerable older adults; by the County Executive's Senior Initiative budget; by the development and implementation of Age-Friendly Montgomery strategic plan activities; and by the Senior Agenda, which was developed by the Commission and adopted by the Council in 2012.

The Commission's budget priorities are developed through our Summer Studies, Committee work and Public Forums. Our most recent Stakeholder meeting, held on March 28, 2018, continued the 2017 event's focus on Age-Friendly Montgomery, and this year highlighted civic and social engagement, elder abuse prevention, employment, and public safety. These events provide opportunities for older residents to share their concerns and to inform our decision-making and advocacy.

COA's budget priorities for FY19 are preserving and expanding affordable housing for seniors and maintaining services for vulnerable older adults and addressing selected reductions in the County's budget affecting older adults. With the number of persons 65 years of age and older in Montgomery County expected to more than double from 2010 to 2040, the County must continue to support critical safety net programs that permit older adults to live safely in their homes and communities. Our budget priorities are intended to increase staffing and programming to accommodate the growing needs of our most vulnerable older adults, and to increase affordable housing options. Given the current fiscal climate, we have limited our budget requests to those we believe to be of the highest priority.

RESPONSE TO FY19 SENIOR INITIATIVE BUDGET

Support for Proposed Budget Items

We appreciate the continued funding of essential supports and services for which we have advocated in the past, including the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program and Senior Center Services; as well as the Mobility Manager, Village Coordinator, Caregiver Support Coordinator, and the Age-Friendly Senior Fellow.

The County Executive's FY19 budget provides funding for Medical Adult Daycare subsidies. It also continues funding for Adult Evaluation and Review Services (AERS) evaluations; various transportation services; enhanced Senior Safety Outreach by Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS); and staffing in the State's Attorney Office Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults (CASVA) unit. It supports communication initiatives, and leverages county resources through grants to community partners.

We continue to support the County Executive's and the Council's efforts to improve and enhance affordable housing opportunities, to increase protections for renters, to reduce the property tax burden on seniors, and to create incentives for home modifications (Design for Life).

The Commission is also pleased to support the following budget items in the County Executive's FY19 Senior Initiative:

- \$4.06 million to support senior affordable housing;
- \$169,405 to add a full-time Community Nurse II and to annualize the cost of one full-time Social Worker III in the Mobile Integrated Health Program;
- \$813,759 for financial assistance to Adult Medical Day Care providers, to subsidize salary increases to meet the County's minimum wage;
- \$30,000 community grant to JCA to establish, in partnership with the Recreation Department, one additional site for seniors with early stage memory loss;

Concern About Proposed Budget Reductions

As much as the Commission applauds the inclusion of the budget items described above, we are concerned about proposed reductions in funding for programs that serve lower income and other vulnerable older adults.

Recreation Department Transportation

The FY19 budget included the following reductions:

- \$91,924 reduction in Recreation Department funding, which will result in the elimination of JCA's Friday bus transportation to senior centers;
- \$12,560 reduction in Recreation Department funding, which will result in fewer mini-trips for seniors.

While the number of people served on a particular day of the week, or at a particular site, may be small, the benefits of participation are great. For many isolated and otherwise vulnerable older adults, a senior center may provide the only opportunity for social interaction and a healthy meal. Without county-provided transportation, these benefits will be lost.

Likewise, the Recreation Department's mini-trips to cultural or historical sites such as museums, the County Fair, and shopping venues, provide older adults without personal or financial resources, an opportunity for social engagement and mental stimulation.

Cost to reinstate: \$104,484

Housing Initiative Fund (HIF)

The demand for affordable housing is increasing as our older adult population is growing. COA has prioritized the need for more affordable housing options for seniors, protections for renters, and for seniors who are homeless. Our 2017 Summer Study, "Preserving and Expanding Affordable Rental Housing in Montgomery County and its Impact on Seniors," includes several recommendations in this area.

We appreciate the County Executive's continued efforts to support affordable housing options in the County, but we note that the budget proposal presents a total of \$51.6 million in combined Housing Initiative Fund – Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funding for FY19, which is less than the approximately \$53.5 million

budgeted in FY18. It appears that the County's contribution to the Fund would be slightly lower in FY19 than it was in FY18 (\$36.5 million in FY19 vs. \$35.5 million in FY18). CIP funding for housing is also slightly lower (\$16 million in FY19 vs \$17 million in FY18).

The COA 2017 Summer Study supported the recommendation of the County's 2017 Rental Housing Study by RKG Associates "that Montgomery County follow the District of Columbia's lead and increase dedicated funding to at least \$100 million annually". We regard this amount as a multi-year goal and are concerned that the FY19 request would move the county further from, rather than closer to, this goal at a time when there is a continuing critical need for affordable housing in the County.

We continue to urge the Council to ensure that long-range planning, including innovative solutions to expand and preserve affordable housing is undertaken for both older adult owned housing and rental housing to ensure a range of safe, affordable housing alternatives. We also continue to strongly suggest that the Council research the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program and support a carve out for Montgomery County, similar to the carve out currently in place in Northern Virginia.

Amount requested: Combined HIF-CIP FY19 funding should at least match the amount provided in FY18, which is \$53.5 million.

Additional Budget Requests

We also wish to highlight some additional budget priority items that COA requested and that are not fully reflected in the County Executive's budget proposal. These services provide crucial protection and support for our most vulnerable residents, and we urge the Council to consider funding them.

Long Term Care Ombudsman Program - One Full Time Ombudsman Position

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which is mandated under the Older Americans Act, utilizes staff and volunteers to advocate for high quality care and protection for some of the frailest and most vulnerable members of our community. The program receives some federal and state funding, but those amounts are inadequate to meet the need, and additional county support is essential.

Maryland ranks 43rd in the nation for timely investigations of high-level complaints in skilled nursing facilities (nursing homes), according to a recent Baltimore Sun analysis of data collected by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General. The data show that in 2015-6, the state failed to investigate approximately 650 allegations of harm at Maryland nursing homes within a required 10-day window – missing the required federal deadline 74% of the time. While the Inspector General's data is not broken out by county, a 2014 report by the Maryland-based advocacy organization Voices for Quality Care gave several Montgomery County nursing homes a D+ quality rating for three years in a row. And, in 2017 the Maryland Health Care Commission's Nursing Home Compare website identified approximately one-third of Montgomery County nursing homes as falling "below" or "much below" the national average in overall quality measures.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program currently serves more than 7,700 older adults and people with disabilities in 34 nursing homes and 195 assisted living facilities in Montgomery County. Twenty-five additional assisted living facilities have license applications pending approval by the State and are expected to open in FY18 and FY19. This will result in a 10% increase in the number of facilities in two years. In addition, a 64-bed memory care facility is expected to open in the County in FY20.

An additional full-time staff position would manage the extra workload and supervise ten volunteer ombudspersons, to help monitor and improve the quality of care in these facilities.

Amount requested: \$ 87,097.

Public Guardianship Program – One Full Time Social Worker Position

The state mandated Public Guardianship Program provides proxy decision-making for adults whom the court has determined lack the capacity to make their own decisions about essential aspects of their lives (e.g., housing or medical care) and for whom there is no less restrictive alternative, including no appropriate family member to serve in this role.

The Public Guardianship Program currently serves 78 clients age 65 and older, and 36 clients age 18-64, an increase of 11% over the last four years. The program also provides services to more than 80 continuing Adult Protective Service (APS) clients who are not under guardianship, conducts guardianship assessments after receiving referrals from hospitals, and provides services to clients of the Social Services to Adults program.

An additional full-time Social Worker is needed to provide services to these very vulnerable clients, who are often victims, or at risk of becoming victims, of abuse or neglect.

Amount request \$ 99,629.

Senior Center Plus/Early Stage Memory Loss Pilot Program

This program provides structured activities and support tailored to the individual needs of senior center participants with early stage memory loss. JCA currently operates a small program at one location using private foundation funding. The County Executive's budget proposal includes a \$30,000 grant to fund operation of an additional site.

We urge the Council to increase this amount.

Senior Center staff are seeing more individuals whose minor cognitive impairments prevent them from joining in the activities available at the center. As a result, these individuals may stay in one location, e.g., the lobby area, for the entire day. They would benefit tremendously from Senior Center Plus. There are currently 43 Senior Center Plus sites in Maryland, including in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, and Howard counties. Fairfax County, Virginia, operates a robust program with more than \$1 million in county funds.

If funded at the level COA requests, the pilot program could be expanded to two sites: Mid-County (Layhill Road/Bel Pre) and East County (Route 29 or Praisner Center).

Amount requested: \$150,000.

Respite Care Services – Support for Minimum Wage Increases - Direct Care Staff.

DHHS contracts with The Arc of Montgomery to provide respite services to unpaid, live-in, primary caregivers of frail older adults, who are typically family members. Respite can provide short-term relief for the caregiver for a few hours, a day, a weekend, or sometimes longer. Families can choose from several respite care venues, including the family home and approved respite facilities. Services may be provided at two levels: supervisory and personal care, and skilled nursing care.

The ARC has absorbed two rate increases within its existing appropriation and has implemented several cost containment measures to minimize the impact of those increases. A new challenge for The ARC is meeting the County's new minimum wage requirements. The County Executive's proposed FY19 budget recognizes the

need to assist certain direct service providers with meeting minimum wage requirements for their employees. Respite care is another area where this financial assistance is needed.

Amount requested: \$89,000.

Respite Care Services – Increased Funding for Respite House.

While respite services can be provided in the home, service providers report that more of their clients are choosing to have their loved ones receive care in an approved respite facility. Respite House needs additional funding to cover the cost of providing these additional respite hours, and like The Arc, discussed above, it also needs funding to meet the County’s minimum wage requirements for its direct care staff.

Amount requested: \$50,000

CONCLUSION

The Commission on Aging understands the need for strategic fiscal management in uncertain times, and we appreciate the County Executive’s and the County Council’s commitment to serving the needs of seniors.

The operating funds increases COA seeks would cost the County approximately \$445,210 in FY19. In total, these additional expenditures would represent just 0.01 percent of the County Executive’s \$5.6 billion proposed FY19 budget. The cost of reinstating the Recreation Department transportation items listed above would be only \$104,484. Ensuring that the combined HIF-CIP FY19 funding at least matches the amount provided in FY18 would continue the County’s commendable commitment to affordable housing. Together, these investments would make a tangible difference in the lives of our most vulnerable older residents.