



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC)

Date: September 30, 2019 (FY20 First Quarter Report)

BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)

BCC Representative: Jean Dinwiddie, Chair

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of seniors can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to provide programs such as home care and nurse monitoring services, respite care, and rental assistance, and also the County's efforts to recognize the needs of its increasingly diverse communities. During the next fiscal year we will continue to advocate for strong budgets to finance services that are vital to our older adult population.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues active participation in the Age Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. The Commission Chair is a member of the Age Friendly Advisory Group, and individual CoA members participate in the various committees, all with the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a Community for a Lifetime.

Recap of FY19 Activities

On September 27, 2018, the CoA meeting focused on identifying its FY20 budget priorities. Those priorities include (1) budget items for which the CoA advocated in FY19 but which were not funded; (2) budget items resulting from Summer Study recommendations that have not been implemented; and (3) budget items resulting from CoA programs, Age-Friendly workgroup meetings, stakeholder and public forums, and other input.

The budget priorities were described in the Commission's October 15, 2018 letter to then Council member George Leventhal.

On October 22, 2018, CoA Chair, Isabelle Schoenfeld, gave testimony to the Montgomery County Council HHS Committee regarding the CoA's FY20 budget priorities including: expanding Senior Center Plus Programs for those with early stage memory loss; assisting with increases in respite care rates and services; reinstating funding to the recreation department for Friday transportation to senior centers and mini trips; adding a new social work position in the Public Guardianship Program; and creating a new position, "Coordinator for Outreach and Support to Older Adults in Diverse Communities." In addition, because the demand for

affordable senior housing is increasing, the CoA continues to consider affordable housing options a priority for seniors.

In December 2018 the CoA completed and printed a “Commission on Aging Briefing Book” describing the CoA and highlighting issues of importance to older adults in the County. The Briefing Book was distributed to the County Executive and County Council members, County Department Directors, the County delegation to the General Assembly, and other stakeholders. The Commission’s annual Legislative Breakfast for the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly, which is usually held in November, was postponed until 2020 due to a number of factors, including the elections and follow up activities, and calendar conflicts.

During the November 29, 2018 meeting, the Commission elected officers for 2019. They are: Jean Dinwiddie, Chair; Stephanie Edelstein, Vice-Chair; Beverly Rollins, Secretary; and Revathi Vikram, Budget and Finance Officer.

Public Forum. On March 19, 2019 the CoA held a public forum at the Civic Building in Silver Spring to examine issues that individuals within the County’s increasingly diverse older adult communities face. The CoA’s main goals for hosting the event were to (1) learn from representatives of these communities about the major issues and challenges facing their older adults; (2) provide an opportunity for members of these communities to hear from County government representatives regarding the services that are available to them; (3) allow individuals to address their concerns to County and community representatives; and (4) invite participants to share helpful information and experiences with other participants. Approximately 120 individuals attended.

Forum participants agreed that older adults in Montgomery County’s diverse communities share significant challenges in the course of their daily lives. These challenges include language inaccessibility; little or no access to transportation, services and opportunities; a lack of cultural sensitivity (i.e., an appreciation and acknowledgement of the individuals’ existence); and a need for strong community leadership. Another group, the LGBTQ community, faces all of those challenges in addition to a number of others: they often remain single (and do not have partners to care for them); live alone; do not have children; are ostracized by family; fear mistreatment from health care providers; are more likely to face poverty and homelessness; and carry stigmas into later life. All of these challenges, either alone or in combination, contribute to the overarching and devastating challenge of social isolation.

The CoA will identify ways to follow up on the issues identified at the Public Forum.

Other CoA activities included:

- At the CoA’s January 17, 2019 meeting, Commission members voted to adhere to the following work plan: during the months of January and February each Committee will decide on a focus (or more than one), and by June issue a 1-2-page report with recommendations to the full CoA. Once the reports have been submitted CoA members will decide whether to follow through with recommendations (which could be for policy or budget advocacy);

whether more research is needed on that topic; and whether the issue is one that other committees could also address through a different lens. There will be no summer study.

- The CoA brochure was revised.
- The CoA's 2018 Annual Report was released.
- Seven new CoA Commissioners were appointed.
- Commissioners met with County Council members to discuss the County's FY20 budget and to advocate for CoA priorities.

FY20 First Quarter Activities

During the first quarter of FY20, the Commission concentrated its efforts on setting its budget priorities for FY21. A special meeting was held on July 25 where CoA members discussed strategies for advancing those priorities with Gabriel Albornoz, Member, Montgomery County Council; Dr. Raymond Crowell, Director, Montgomery County Health and Human Services; Richard Madaleno, Director, Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget; and Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council. Following this discussion, and taking into consideration previous CoA research and recommendations, FY20 priorities that were not funded but where the need continues, input from agency directors, and other information, the Commission adopted the following budget priorities for FY21:

HHS: (1) Expand home delivered Senior Nutrition programs to include weekends; (2) add two social worker positions: one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship program; and (3) increase the subsidy for small group homes and Adult Foster Care.

Recreation: (1) Restore FY20 cuts affecting programs serving older adults; and (2) increase hours of service for senior programs.

Housing: Continue to increase the Housing Initiative Fund to further expand affordable housing options for older adults.

While the CoA may not be able to advocate for all issues, especially since it is often asked to identify its top two or three budget priorities, the list is important because it provides additional guidance for advocacy moving forward. Some budget items for which the CoA has advocated in the past received support even though they did not rise to the highest level of priority this year. These include Friday transportation to senior centers; restoring the senior fellow positions and adding one more position on diversity issues; and expanding funding for the early stage memory loss program at senior centers. We will continue to advocate for these items as appropriate. Some additional issues – e.g., hearing loss and social isolation, older adult employment, the new Flex Ride program – will be studied further by CoA committees.

The CoA was pleased to learn recently that the County will receive additional State funding to cover the costs of expanding the home delivered meals program during the weekend for interested program participants.

During this quarter, the Commission welcomed two new members.

Aging in Community Committee

The Committee heard from a number of speakers during the quarter, including Suzanne Ludlow, City Manager of Takoma Park, who discussed rent stabilization; David Gamse, CEO of the Jewish Council for the Aging and Co-chair of the Age-Friendly Employment Domain workgroup; and Anita Brady, Manager of Training and Organizational Development, Montgomery County Government, who discussed efforts to build a multi-generational workforce in Montgomery County.

Upcoming research. One project that Committee members are looking at are activities that seniors can do outside of paid employment. The Committee will also continue to monitor County activities concerning affordable housing and Montgomery County’s Flex Pilot transportation program and is considering whether to undertake an examination of food insecurity among older adults in the County.

Health and Wellness Committee

“Gap” population. The Committee researched the issues faced by the “Gap” population – those individuals whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford assisted living. The Committee released a paper on its findings that included recommendations.

Upcoming research. The “Gap” paper leads to many other topics that the committee could explore. One topic could be the regulations governing assisted living. Committee members held a discussion with Eileen Bennett, who manages the County’s Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, regarding this issue. The committee is also considering researching social isolation as it relates to hearing impairments.

Public Policy Committee

State Legislative Session. When the General Assembly was in session earlier this year, Committee members monitored and reported to the CoA on proposed State legislation that would affect older adults in the County. On behalf of the CoA, the Public Policy Committee advocated in support of several bills.

Proposed Association of Maryland Commissions on Aging (AMCoA). Committee members contacted other Maryland Commissions on Aging to encourage them to contact the Montgomery County CoA if they would like to pursue a State-wide Maryland association. The goal of such an association would be to share information about issues of common interest, and to advocate on those issues as appropriate. On September 17, 2019 Howard County hosted an invitational meeting of Commissions on Aging from around the State, which representatives of the CoA attended.

Transportation Services Improvement Fund. The TSIF is the result of a surcharge imposed on Uber and Lyft rides, intended to support transportation options for persons with disabilities and older and low-income persons. The CoA and the Commission on Persons with Disabilities (CPWD) advocated for the creation of this fund and were disappointed to learn in 2018 that money that was supposed to be dedicated to the fund was used for other budget purposes. At the

urging of the CoA and the CPWD, the Department of Transportation issued proposed regulations intended to protect the fund. Committee members, along with representatives of the Taxicab Commission and the CPWD, met with Tom Hucker, Chair of the County Council Transportation and Environment Committee, to discuss their concerns.

Other Issues. The Committee is researching how and whether AARP's "Age Friendly" status will be possible for the State of Maryland. The Committee is also looking at polling place accessibility issues. A Board of Elections representative addressed CoA members at their September meeting. In addition, on behalf of the CoA the Public Policy Committee successfully advocated for a return to the Senior Initiative Budget in the County budget book as itemized under former County Executive Ike Leggett. Lastly, the Committee will be coordinating the CoA's 2019 legislative breakfast for members of the General Assembly, to be held on November 14, 2019.

Communications and Community Outreach Task Force

This quarter, in consultation with the Executive Committee and members of the Communications and Community Outreach Committee, the CoA Chair designated the Committee as a Task Force. As such, the group will operate less formally but with more versatility, meeting as needed and serving as a resource to the CoA on communications and messaging issues. The Task Force will continue to be actively involved in the cable access television program, "Seniors Today."

CoA Key Messages. Noting that it is important that the CoA members be consistent in what they communicate during interviews and written communications, the Task Force developed a slate of key messages that CoA members can reference. Also, the Task Force plans to be involved when CoA members receive requests for interviews and will maintain a list of media contacts. The Committee is looking at all of the CoA's vehicles of communication and trying to get a handle on who sees what and who the CoA is reaching. In this regard, Task Force members plan to meet with staff of the County's Public Information Office. The committee also contacted Margaret Foster, new editor of the *Beacon* newspaper, regarding using the CoA as a resource on older adult issues in Montgomery County.

"Seniors Today." A Committee member is currently guest hosting this monthly cable access television program which is co-produced by the CoA and the County. The program airs several times each month and is also available on the County's YouTube channel. Recent guests included:

Karen Bashir, Neal Potter Path of Achievement Award Honoree
Eileen Bennett, Long Term Care Ombudsman Program Director, Aging and Disability Services
Lauren Campbell, Strathmore Hall Foundation, Inc.
Adriane Clutter, Department of Parks and Recreation
Kelly Davis, State's Attorney's Office
Jean Dinwiddie, Chair, Commission on Aging
Marc Elrich, County Executive
Jaquette Frazier, Neal Potter Path of Achievement Award Honoree
Will Kenlaw, Department of Transportation

M. Jane Markley, Advance Planning Consultant
Deborah Missal, 50+ Volunteer Network
Sam Oji, Department of Transportation
Melanie Polk, Senior Nutrition Program
Betty Romero, AARP Maryland
Anita Vassallo, Montgomery County Libraries
Susan I. Wranik, Speech Language Pathologist
Gretchen Zekiel, Senior Fellow and 50+ Volunteer Network

Upcoming Activities

Commissioners will be monitoring efforts to re-certify Montgomery County as Age-Friendly and also the efforts to certify the State of Maryland as Age-Friendly. In addition, CoA members will be meeting with County agency directors, Council members, and the County Executive to advocate for the CoA's FY21 budget priorities. The CoA Chair will testify at the County Council HHS Committee hearing on October 10.

The Commission will host its annual Legislative Breakfast on Thursday, November 14, 2019. Members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly will be invited to attend to discuss issues relevant to Montgomery County's older adults, to learn about CoA priorities, and to share their priorities with Commission members.

The CoA will also begin planning its annual Public Forum. The 2020 forum is scheduled for March 18, 2020 and will be held in collaboration with the City of Gaithersburg. The focus of the forum will be determined in the near future. Invitees will include members of the public, the County Executive, County Council members, agency directors and other interested officials.

The CoA will release its Annual Report during the winter of 2020.

Collaboration with Other Boards, Commissions, and Committees

CoA collaborates with other Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as appropriate. CoA also welcomes representatives of other Boards, Commissions and Committees at its standing committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their B/C/or C's activities at CoA's monthly meetings.