



## COMMISSION ON AGING

October 10, 2019

The Honorable Marc Elrich, County Executive  
Executive Office Building  
101 Monroe Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Elrich:

Please find below the Commission on Aging's (COA's) priorities for FY21. We thank you for the strong support you have provided over the years to older adults in Montgomery County and their families.

Montgomery County must continue to make progress as a community for a lifetime for its residents by ensuring that all those in need have access to the safety net of vital services and supports essential for their well-being and are provided with access to housing that is affordable, so that they can remain vital members of our community. This will help to address the results of the County's 2017 Community Livability survey, which reveal a decrease in the percentage of people who plan to retire in the County. The overall findings of that survey suggest that residents' main concern regarding retirement in the County is the high cost of living. The Montgomery County Planning Department of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission issued a report, Meeting the Housing Needs of Older Adults in Montgomery County, which provides the following summary of the Community Livability survey result:

Montgomery County, Maryland is a community offering high-quality services and amenities to people of all ages and at all stages of life. According to the County's 2017 Community Livability Report, 90 percent of County residents 55 and older say that Montgomery County is a "good" or "excellent" place to live. The County scores particularly high among older adults in terms of its health services, public safety, and parks and activities. However, only 50 percent of residents 55 and older said that Montgomery County was a good place to retire. And just 25 percent rated the cost of living favorably. Therefore, despite the high quality of life enjoyed by many residents in Montgomery County, there are challenges to ensuring that people can remain in the County as they age and that the County's opportunities and amenities are available to all older adults, regardless of income:

<http://montgomeryplanning.org/tools/research/special-studies/housing-for-older-adults-study>

COA's annual County budget recommendations are informed by our Senior Agenda ([https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/resources/files/senior\\_agenda.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/resources/files/senior_agenda.pdf)), COA public forums, COA Committees' Focus Areas, COA monthly meetings and summer studies. These activities benefit from input and feedback from subject matter experts and members of the public, especially, older adults and their families.

**Department of Health and Human Services**

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[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs)

COA's budget recommendations fall into three areas: Department of Recreation, Department of Health & Human Services, and Affordable Housing.

## **DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION**

### **Restore Cuts to Senior Programming**

Recreational programs at senior and community centers can include healthy meals, social engagement, and intellectual stimulation – all essential for older adults who might otherwise be isolated and alone. The benefits of participation in these programs are pronounced. For many isolated and otherwise vulnerable older adults, a senior program or senior center may provide the only opportunity for social interaction and a healthy meal. Moreover, at our March 2019 Public Forum, “Older Adults in the County’s Diverse Racial, Ethnic and LGBTQ Communities,” which included panel discussions and breakout sessions, many speakers indicated that senior programs were especially beneficial to older adults of diverse communities, especially in addressing their unique challenges of social isolation.

While the Senior Adult Programs budget look at a distance to be flat-funded in the FY20 budget, the operating expenses – the actual programs – have been cut in each of the last four budgets. These program cuts have been masked by increases in personnel costs attributable to salary and benefit costs of current employees. To provide points of comparison, Montgomery County budgets approximately \$2 million/year for senior recreation services while Howard County provides \$2.35 million, and Fairfax County close to \$4.3 million.

In FY19, the County's reductions in funding for the Department of Recreation resulted in the elimination of two programs that primarily serve lower-income and vulnerable older adults: Friday bus transportation to senior centers and mini-trips. As previously noted, for many isolated and otherwise vulnerable older adults, a senior program or senior center may provide their only opportunity for social interaction and a healthy meal. Without County-provided transportation, these benefits may be lost. Likewise, the Department's mini-trips to cultural or historical sites such as museums, the County Fair, and shopping venues, provide older adults who lack personal or financial resources, an opportunity for social engagement and intellectual stimulation. The COA requests that these services be restored.

### **Increase Service Hours for Recreation Department Senior Programs**

As discussed above, senior services at County senior and recreation centers provide vital services to the County's vulnerable older residents, including providing nutritious meals and combating social isolation. However, there are simply not enough programs specifically intended for seniors. This problem is exacerbated during the summer months when County recreation centers are devoted primarily to children's summer camp activities during the week.

### **Expand Early Stage Memory Loss Program (Senior Center Plus)**

Early Stage Memory Loss Programs, or Senior Center Plus, provide structured activities and support tailored to the individual needs of senior center participants with early stage memory loss. Senior Center staff are encountering more individuals who are brought to the center by caregivers but whose cognitive impairments prevent them from joining regular center activities. However, center staff have neither the time nor the training or expertise to provide these individuals with the individualized services they need. As a result, these participants may remain in one location, e.g., lobby area, for the entire day. They would benefit from the Senior Center Plus program.

The Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) has operated a small early stage memory loss program in Germantown with private grant funds, serving eight people/two days per week on a sliding fee scale. In FY19, JCA used a

County grant to start a second program at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center in partnership with the Recreation Department. This program operates only one day a week.

Montgomery County lags behind neighboring jurisdictions in providing this important service. 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 \$1million in county funds.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

### **Add Two Social Worker Positions – Adult Protective Services and Public Guardianship Adult Protective Services**

Adult Protective Services is a State-mandated program that investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and/or exploitation of vulnerable adults. APS provides professional services to reduce risk factors and promote protection of the health, safety and welfare of endangered, vulnerable adults. A vulnerable adult is one who lacks the physical or mental capacity to provide for his/her daily needs.

The number of APS investigations has increased 53 percent over the past five years. During the same period, financial exploitation cases have quadrupled, in part due to mandatory reporting laws. Financial exploitation cases now make up 35 percent of all APS cases. To put an actual number to this data: in FY19, APS served more than 1,000 at-risk residents. In August 2018 alone, the APS caseload was 119, the highest in the program's history. Investigations can be long, complicated, and sensitive, and they require trained and licensed staff.

An additional Social Worker position will help the County meet its obligation to serve some of our most vulnerable residents – those who are victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

### **Public Guardianship Program**

The State-mandated Public Guardianship Program provides substitute 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, safety, or medical care) and for whom there is no less restrictive alternative, including no appropriate family member or loved one to serve in this role. The Public Guardianship Program has seen an 18 percent increase in the number of clients over the last four years. In addition, the number of court cases involving financial exploitation has more than doubled since FY13 - with an average of nearly 25 successful guardianship of property cases filed annually. Public Guardianship Program caseloads are likely to continue to increase, as the program is closely tied to Adult Protective Services (APS), described above.

In addition to serving as court-appointed decision maker for some of the most vulnerable residents of our community, the Public Guardianship Program also provides services to continuing 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 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. As with APS, Public Guardianship Program services cannot be curtailed due to a shortage of funds.

### **Increase Payment Rates for the Adult Foster Care Program (Assisted Living Group Home)**

This program provides supervised housing and assistance with daily needs, plus case management, to adults with disabilities who live in small, State-licensed group homes in the community. Providers receive subsidies

on behalf of eligible residents who are unable to afford the full cost of their care and who might otherwise need to live in a nursing home.

The County has long recognized that, while this is a State licensed and subsidized program, the need for services exceeds availability. To increase the number of providers, the County offers its own subsidy payments. However, these rates are rarely increased, and they remain lower than those offered by the State.

In FY15, recognizing that County payment rates had remained flat for 20 years, COA advocated for annual incremental increases. As a result, each year in FY15, FY16, and FY17, County subsidies were increased by \$175 per month per resident. During that time, 12 new providers enrolled in the program.

Going into FY21, County subsidy payments remain significantly lower than those provided by the State. The County subsidy is \$1700 per month per person for a shared room and \$1900 for private room. By comparison, the State payment per month per person is \$2050 or \$2450 (depending on the level of care needed) and the Medicaid payment is \$2385.

COA is requesting an increase of \$150 per person per month in the County subsidy payments. For the 111 clients in the program, such an increase would cost \$199,800.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The demand for affordable housing continues to increase as our older adult population grows. As a result, COA continues to prioritize the need for more affordable housing options for seniors (including housing that offers wrap-around services), and protections for renters. COA's 2017 Summer Study, "Preserving and Expanding Affordable Rental Housing in Montgomery County and its Impact on Seniors," included several recommendations in this area.

### **Continue to Build the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF)**

COA appreciates the Council's continued efforts to support affordable housing options in the County, including through use of the HIF.

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 [for affordable housing] to at least \$100 million annually." COA regards this amount as a multi-year goal to address the continuing critical need for affordable housing in the County, so we renew our request for additional funding for HIF.

COA continues 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 recommend that the Council work with the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly to 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.

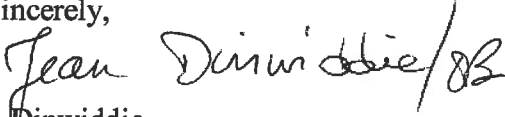
## **CONCLUSION**

COA appreciates the County Executive's and the County Council's demonstrated commitment to serving our older residents. With the number of County residents 60 years of age and older increasing by approximately 5,000 people each year and becoming increasingly diverse, the County must continue to support critical

programs that permit all older adults to live safely in their homes and communities, and to enjoy a high quality of life, regardless of income.

Thank you for the opportunity to share COA's priorities for the FY21 budget. We look forward to working with the Council and the County Executive's office on these issues.

Sincerely,

  
Jean Dinwiddie  
Chair, COA

cc: Richard Madaleno, Director, Office of Management and Budget

