



COMMISSION ON AGING

Ranking of COA Priorities for Fiscal Year 2019

The Commission on Aging's overarching priorities for FY 2019 are preserving and expanding affordable housing for seniors and maintaining services for vulnerable seniors in light of anticipated deep cuts to federal safety net programs. We are also very concerned about the County Executive's directive to county departments to plan for a 4% reduction in FY 2019 and most recently, to reduce the current (FY 2018) budget by an additional 1%. Taking these developments into consideration, we have ranked our budget priorities as follows:

1. Preserve and Expand Affordable Rental Housing Options

The demand for affordable housing is increasing as our older adult population expands and ever higher rents outstrip the rise in household incomes. According to DHCA, there is a shortage of 50,000 affordable rental units today, and 61% of senior renters are rent-burdened. We continue to prioritize the need for more affordable housing options for seniors, more protections for renters, and more programs and services to address senior homelessness. 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 urge the Council to ensure that long-range planning, including innovative solutions to expand and preserve affordable housing, is undertaken for older adult owned and rental housing to ensure a range of safe, affordable housing options. We strongly encourage the County Executive and County Council to research the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program and to work with our state delegation to support a carve out for Montgomery County in the state LIHTC allocation plan, similar to the carve out that has been implemented in Northern Virginia.

As a budget item, COA recommends increasing the County's contribution to the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF). This innovative fund is vital to the creation and preservation of affordable housing for Montgomery County's families, singles, seniors, and people with special needs. COA's 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 also note that the District just established a new \$10 million preservation fund to seed public-private preservation partnerships.

COA also recommends that the County explore how the MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) program could be made more senior friendly, including through the inclusion of universal design features.

Amount requested: The amount necessary to ensure that HIF balance is at least \$50 million at the beginning of FY 2019, in order to make progress in preserving and expanding the availability of affordable housing in the County.

2. Long Term Care Ombudsman Program: One Full Time Ombudsman Position

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which is mandated by 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 648 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 identifies 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 FY 2018 and FY 2019. 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 along River Road in FY 2020. The additional staff position requested would manage the extra workload and supervise ten volunteer ombudspersons, to help improve the quality of care in these facilities.

Amount requested: \$ 87,097

3. Public Guardianship Program–One Full Time Social Worker Position

The Public Guardianship Program, like the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, is a federally mandated service funded in part by the federal and state governments. As with the LTCOP, the County provides additional funding to ensure that required services are provided and our residents’ needs are met.

As Public Guardian, the Department of Health and Human Services 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.*, food, clothing, shelter, or medical care) and for whom there is no less restrictive alternative. The Public Guardianship Program currently serves 78 clients age 65 and older, and 36 clients age 18-64, a total increase of 18% over the last four years. The program also provides services to 72 continuing Adult Protective Services 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.

Amount requested: \$99,629

4. 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,

Senior Center staff are seeing more individuals whose minor cognitive impairments prevent them from joining in the activities available. As a result, they may stay in one location, *e.g.*, the lobby area, for the 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, the pilot program could be provided under contract with a non-profit agency. For example, JCA currently operates a small program in Germantown with grant funds, serving 8 people/2 days per week on a sliding fee scale. It would be implemented in partnership with the Recreation Department, which would

provide free space at two Senior Centers. The possible locations would be Mid-County (Layhill Road/Bel Pre) and East County (Route 29 or Praisner Center).

Amount requested: \$150,000

5. **Respite Care Services–Additional Funding to Support Minimum Wage Increase for Direct Care Staff**

The Arc, which provides two levels of respite services through a contract with the County, has absorbed two rate increases within its existing appropriation. In early FY 2017, the State implemented a rate increase for Level II services in the Respite Program (increase from \$25 to \$34/hour). In addition, effective FY 2018, the Arc increased its Level I rates for agencies only from \$14.50/hour to \$17.50/hour.

The Level I rate increases for agencies was needed because of the increases to the County minimum wage (now at \$11.50). Most agencies within the Respite Consortium are paying their direct care staff between \$14-\$15/hour, so respite provider agencies did not have sufficient capacity within the \$14.50 rate to pay for overhead costs.

In FY 2019, the Arc needs to raise the Level I rate to \$20/hour. The potential fiscal impact of such an increase is \$89,000.

Amount requested: \$89,000

6. **Respite Care Services-Increased Funding for Respite House**

More clients are choosing to have their loved ones receive care in a respite facility rather than having respite care in their home. Because of this big budget pressure has been on the Respite Housing funding. Most of the clients using the respite house model are using Level II services (with a \$34/hour rate).

Amount requested: \$50,000

7. **State’s Attorney’s Office – One Full Time Fraud Investigator Position**

The State’s Attorney’s Office’s Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults Unit is required to investigate referrals of elder abuse and/or financial exploitation received from Adult Protective Services. In recent years, the number of referrals has climbed appreciably, as has the incidence of elder financial exploitation. The State’s Attorney’s office reports that in 2016, 29% of all APS referrals included a financial exploitation component. In August 2017, 41% of APS referrals were for financial exploitation. Much of this increase can be attributed to laws requiring banks and other financial institutions to report suspected financial abuse. In 2017, Maryland law expanded the category of mandatory reporter to include mortgage brokers, which is likely to increase referrals even more.

In FY 2018, the County funded two additional staff attorney positions to prosecute elder abuse cases. The Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults Unit, and the very vulnerable residents who are served, would benefit significantly from a designated fraud investigator.

Amount requested: \$99,629

Conclusion

The Commission appreciates the County Executive’s and the County Council’s demonstrated commitment to serving our older residents. With the number of persons 65 years of age and older in the County increasing by

approximately 9,000 each year, the County must continue to support critical safety net programs that permit older adults to live safely in their homes and communities.

We also recognize the significant challenges for the County presented by proposed reductions in federal funding for programs that serve older adults, including those who are most vulnerable. With that scenario in mind, we have limited our requests to those we believe to be of the highest priority.

Many thanks for the opportunity to share our views regarding the upcoming FY 2019 priorities.