

**Commission of Aging**

**March 25, 2021**

9:30 am – 12:00 pm

**Virtual via Zoom**

**Members Present**

Barbara Selter, Chair  
Edgar Rivas, Vice Chair  
Janice Zalen, Secretary  
Richard Jourdenais, Budget Officer  
Jean Dinwiddie, Past Chair  
Wayne Berman  
Neal Brown  
Joyce Dubow  
Arunima Ghosh  
Miriam Kelty  
Morris Klein  
Nanine Meiklejohn  
Karon Phillips  
Maritza Rivera  
Beverly Rollins  
Monica Schaeffer  
Ann M. Serafenas  
Katie Smith  
Mary Sweeney

Hillery Tsumba  
Tho Tran  
Marsha Weber  
Arthur Williams  
Ryan Wilson

**Members Absent**

Ruby Moone

**Alumni Members**

Barbara Brubeck, Friends  
Austin Heyman  
Chuck Kaufman  
Rev Vikram

**Liaisons**

David Engel, GROWS  
Monique Gardner, African-Amer. Health.  
Denise Israel, MC DOT  
Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly MC

**Speakers**

Josiah Yiu, Access HEARS  
Dr. Carrie Nieman, Access HEARS

## **Staff**

Tremayne Jones, DHHS

Odile Brunetto, DHHS

Patrice McGhee Director, AAA

Shawn Brennan, DHHS

## **Welcome – Barbara Selter, Chair**

Chair Barbara Selter welcomed everyone and took roll of attendees.

## **AAA Update – Patricia McGhee, Director of AAA**

- State Budget
  - MD Department of Aging Secretary Kramer testified in support of Communities for Life and the Durable Medical Equipment program. The subcommittee recommended level funding of these programs.
- County Executive's Budget Proposal:
  - Adds one social worker position to Adult Protective Services.
  - 1.5% inflation increase to all County contracts.
- The State terminated the Memorandum of Understanding with the County regarding nursing facility surveys. The CoA should continue to advocate against the termination even though the outcome likely won't change.
- Plans to open Senior Centers are being worked on, but there is no date set yet for openings. One work group is exploring how other states have handled openings.
- AAA staff is assisting with and promoting COVID vaccine pre-registration. They also are working on setting up the mass vaccination clinic that is due to open the first week of April.

## **Commission on Aging Business**

### ***Approval of February Minutes***

Minutes were approved.

### ***Budget Report***

Budget Officer Richard Jourdenais reported that there were no expenditures this month. There is \$4,895.11 in the Commission's account.

### ***County Council Budget Hearings***

Barbara Selter stated that County Council budget hearings will be held on April 1, 7 and 8 and she will send information about it to the Commission. She encouraged all interested Commission members to attend a hearing.

Austin Heyman noted that there is \$900,000 budgeted for community grants and since many grants support programs for older adults, he suggested that we should look into this. Hillery Tsumba agreed to meet with the Executive Director of Non-Profit Montgomery about it. Barbara Selter will add this topic to the April agenda.

### ***Commission on Aging Letters***

- Janice Zalen was thanked for writing a letter in support of SB204/HB216 on assisted living standards.
- David Engel was thanked for writing a letter in support of HB910, which would require that insurers provide a hearing aid benefit of \$750 per ear.
- Ryan Wilson was thanked for writing a letter in support of HB903, which would establish a task force to study MD's Public Guardianship Program..
- Wayne Berman was thanked for writing a letter regarding changes to Medicaid transportation in MC.

Regarding the termination of the MoU between MC and the State for nursing facility surveys and inspections:

- Edgar Rivas telephoned and emailed Dr. Nay, Director of the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ), but as of today, he has not received an answer.
- Janice Zalen wrote a letter to Dr. Nay and a second letter to the County Executive and County Council. Barbara Selter sent these letters out under the mail-in approval process. Although the majority approved the letter, there was a concern that we did not cite sources in the letter. Janice Zalen agreed to research the subject and provide citations.
- Wayne Berman suggested a third letter that would go to the State Delegation asking that money for an impact statement be added to the budget. This will be discussed further by the Executive Committee.

The following motion was approved: The Public Policy Committee will determine standards for citations for CoA letters critical of other organizations. As a rule, the CoA should follow good standards.

### ***Update on Planning for County Council Visits, Budget Priorities, and Standard Advocacy Messaging***

Shawn Brennan set up and sent out "sign up genius," an easy system for Commissioners to sign up for the County Council visits. Each Commissioner may sign up for two visits and no more than three visits. Commissioners who are involved in a joint visit, should set up a pre-visit call with each other to determine their plan of who speaks when. Barbara Selter will make sure that Arthur Williams receives the sign-up information. Ryan Wilson reminded everyone that we are meeting on behalf of the Commission and must advocate for the Commission priorities. He also noted that there is only a limited amount of time for each visit so plan ahead and be sure to acknowledge items in the budget this year that the Commission has advocated for in previous years,

e.g., additional social worker in Adult Protective Services. Barbara Selter will send out a revised messaging document no later than the beginning of next week. Shawn and Tremayne will set up the Zoom meetings with the Council members.

### ***Report on Topic List for Future Meetings***

Barbara Selter was pleased to announce that eighteen topics were suggested. (She will work with Monique Gardner to make sure that Arthur Williams gets the list.) The EC will hold an extra meeting this summer to devise a strategic plan wherein the topics combine into themes to create a vision for Commission work. This strategic meeting will include reviewing the AAA plan and other pertinent County documents. It was noted that a plan is a good idea, but there must be flexibility to allow for new topics that might arise. It was further noted that some topics may appear on Seniors Today.

### ***Update on Neal Potter Awards***

The winners were announced.

### ***Update on “Seniors Today” Host Appointment***

Katie Smith is the new host.

### ***Update on Task Forces***

- **Social Isolation (SILOS) Task Force:** David Engel reported that SILOS is making good progress on the Public Forum, scheduled for May 18, 10:00 am – 11:30 am. The theme of the Public Forum is “A Commitment to Action: Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults.” The goal is to renew our commitment to the County’s diverse population and learn about local and national initiatives.
- **Task Force on Dementia, Policing and Racial Equity:** Jean Dinwiddie reported that she, Arlee Wallace and Katy Smith are working together to finalize the Task Force’s Report. They will meet regularly until they complete their work.

### ***New Initiatives: Update on Orientation and Buddy System for New Commission Members***

A buddy system for new Commission members is one of the first agenda items of the Communications Committee.

According to Shawn Brennan, the vacancy announcements should be posted this week. Shawn suggested that all Commission members look at the Commission’s web site as a way to gain more understanding. She also suggested looking at other County sites related to aging.

## **Committee Reports**

### ***Health and Wellness Committee (HWC)***

Co-chair Neal Berman stated that the HWC continues to focus on the need for more home-based care, particularly for individuals without Medicaid or other resources. This is the topic of their next meeting on April 2. Co-chair Marsha Weber added that there would be two speakers from an in-home aide service who run a Flex Care program in three independent senior resident buildings in MC. This program allows residents to use services at a lower cost because the aides can provide service in one place. Residents can arrange for 15- minute visit minimums and that can reduce an individual's costs too.

### ***Aging in Community (AIC)***

Co-chair Wayne Berman reported that the AIC's March meeting focused on how the Commission can support better transportation. The Committee determined that transportation should be part of the Commission's budget priorities. There needs to be flexible door-to-door service and transportation to recreation services. The Jewish Council on Aging and the County are working on a training video on how to use the services and the Commission also should be involved in this effort. The next AIC meeting is on April 13 and will focus on affordable housing and food insecurity.

### ***Public Policy Committee (PPC)***

Co-Chair Ryan Wilson stated that the PPC worked on the letters described earlier, and the timing of activities in the General Assembly. HCBS continues to be a big problem as the HCBS waiver seems to be in flux with a reduction in the number of HCBS slots.

### ***Communications Committee (CC)***

The first meeting of the new CC had about 14 attendees. They focused on *Seniors Today*, as well as on their future focus, which will include orientation, advocacy training and other issues. The CC established a subcommittee for *Seniors Today*. The upcoming *Seniors Today* will discuss vaccine hesitancy and variation; Patrice McGhee will speak about the proposed budget; and Barbara Selter will talk about CoA priorities. The CC meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month at 1-2:30 pm.

### **Speakers: Josiah Yiu and Dr. Carrie Nieman of Access HEARS**

Josiah Yiu and Dr. Nieman explained that the goal of today's discussion is to determine how Access HEARS can advance hearing health in Montgomery County. Access HEARS mission is to connect individuals with hearing loss to their hearing needs by:

1. Connecting older adults to hearing technology;
2. Raising awareness about hearing loss; and
3. Building hearing health capacity within aging services.

Mr. Yiu and Dr. Nieman made the following points:

- Hearing loss affects two out of three older adults and progresses with age.

- Hearing loss is associated with many negative outcomes, making hearing care essential.
- Traditional hearing aides cost about \$5,000 so cost is one barrier to hearing health. Physical limitations are also barriers.
- Access HEARS offers affordable solutions and one-time interventions.
- The Hearing Health Equity Initiative in Baltimore provides partially subsidized over-the-counter (OTC) hearing devices to low-income Black older adults in Baltimore.
- Access HEARS established “The Hearing Health Collaborative” in Baltimore in which a Hearing Health Navigator trains other agencies to integrate hearing health into its work. This Navigator is an employee of three organizations in partnership and is installed in the MD Access Point (MAP) Program. This allows basic questions of hearing loss to be integrated into MAP screenings.

Mr. Yiu and Dr. Nieman suggested that possible ways to move forward in MC include:

- A one-time hearing health equity initiative that would be a replica of the Baltimore program;
- Educational outreach; and/or
- Partially subsidized over the counter devices.

During Q&A, the following was discussed:

- Funding: Much of the funding in Baltimore comes from the Weinberg Foundation. Access HEARS would need to secure funding for MC. The AARP Foundation likely would match such funding. A little funding from multiple agencies takes less time than trying to obtain large scale grants. It would cost about \$200,000 to launch an MC program and Access HEARS would provide \$50,000 of that.
- The FTC should be working on regulations for OTC devices.
- The Allegheny and Garrett County model was totally subsidized. Partial subsidization is actually better as it invests the client in resolving hearing loss.

## **Liaison Updates**

- Denise Israel, MC Department of Transportation: Front door boarding and fare collection is being resumed. (NOTE: The County changed plans after the COA meeting. Free fares will continue until at least June 30, 2021.) Virtual Smart Trip cards are available on I-phones.
- Monique Gardner, African-American Health: a black primary care network was developed and they are now working on black education programs, pushing COVID vaccines, developing public health materials with HHS staff, and are partnering with the Housing Opportunity Commission to develop educational materials.
- Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery: there will be a regional age-friendly meeting on May 4-5 that will cover regional issues on May 4 and May 5 will have

speakers on home-sharing and on crimes against seniors and vulnerable adults. Also, Ms. Pruzan is working with AARP on an article highlighting MC.

## **New Business**

- Monica Schaeffer announced the meeting, *Intergenerational Workforce and Combatting Age Discrimination* scheduled for May 21. There is a strong effort to engage employers in this issue.
- Barbara Selter announced that thoughts regarding an Access Hears pilot, i.e., do we like the idea, suggestions for funding, next steps, should go to her or to Neal Brown or Marsha Weber as the HWC will be working on the issue. Clearly, funding is a big issue and ideas and thoughts are welcome .

## **Adjourn**

### **Action Items**

(These action items are based on a review of the minutes)

1. Every Commissioner should sign up for at least one County Council visit. Barbara Selter will make sure that Arthur Williams has the information to sign up.
2. Barbara Selter will send out a revised document on budget priorities early next week, as well as information on the budget hearings.
3. Hillery Tumba will contact the Executive Director of Non-Profit Montgomery about the \$900,000 grant provision in the proposed budget and Barbara Selter will add this topic to the April agenda.
4. Janice Zalen will research issues relating to nursing home surveys and certification and add citations to the Commission's letters.
5. Wayne Berman will discuss with the EC the possibility of a letter that would go to the State Delegation asking that money for an impact statement be added to the budget.
6. The Public Policy Committee will determine standards for citations for CoA letters critical of other organizations. As a rule, the CoA should follow good standards.
7. The EC will meet this summer to determine topics and strategies. Barbara Selter will make sure that Arthur Williams receives the listing of topics.
8. SILOS continues work on the Public Policy Forum.
9. Task Force on Dementia, Policing, and Racial Equity will continue to meet to complete its report.
10. All Commission members should explore the Commission web site and other MC sites related to aging.
11. All Commission members should consider their views regarding expanding Access HEARS to MC and send their thoughts to Barbara Selter or Neal Brown or Marsha Weber.

