



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 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, as well as to recognize the needs of its increasingly diverse communities. During the next fiscal year, we will continue to advocate for substantial budgets to finance services vital to our older adult population.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues to participate in the Age Friendly Montgomery County Initiative actively. 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 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” that described the CoA and highlighted 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 several factors, including the elections and follow-up activities, as well as 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 significant 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 throughout their daily lives. These challenges include language inaccessibility, lack of access to transportation, services, and opportunities, a lack of cultural sensitivity (i.e., an appreciation and acknowledgment of the individuals’ existence), and a need for strong community leadership. Another group, the LGBTQ community, faces all of those challenges in addition to several 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. These challenges, alone or in combination, contribute to social isolation's overarching and devastating challenge.

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 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);

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

- 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 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 of Montgomery County Council; Dr. Raymond Crowell, Director of Montgomery County Health and Human Services; Richard Madaleno, Director of 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 tiny group homes and Adult Foster Care.

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

Housing: Continue increasing the Housing Initiative Fund to 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 essential because it provides additional guidance for advocacy moving forward. Some budget items the CoA has previously advocated received support even though they did not rise to the highest priority level this year. These include Friday transportation to senior centers, restoring the senior fellow positions, 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, and 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 for interested program participants during the weekend.

During this quarter, the Commission welcomed two new members.

Aging in Community Committee

The Committee heard from several 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 is 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 it is considering whether to examine food insecurity among older adults in the county.

Health and Wellness Committee

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 the committee could explore. One topic could be the regulations governing assisted living. Committee members discussed this issue with Eileen Bennett, who manages the County’s Long-term Care Ombudsman Program. The committee is also considering researching social isolation related 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 supported 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 results from a surcharge on Uber and Lyft rides 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. They 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 the CoA and the CPWD, the Department of Transportation issued proposed regulations 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 coordinate the CoA’s 2019 legislative breakfast for members of the General Assembly, which will be held on November 14, 2019.

Communications and Community Outreach Task Force

In consultation with the Executive Committee and Communications and Community Outreach Committee members this quarter, 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 actively participating in the cable access television program “Seniors Today.”

CoA Key Messages. Noting that it is essential 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 interview requests and will maintain a list of media contacts. The Committee is looking at all of the CoA’s communication vehicles 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 the County’s Public Information Office staff. The committee also contacted Margaret Foster, the 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 co-produced by the CoA and the County. The program airs several times monthly and is 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 monitor efforts to re-certify Montgomery County as Age-Friendly and certify the State of Maryland as Age-Friendly. In addition, CoA members will meet 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 will be held on March 18, 2020, and will collaborate with the City of Gaithersburg. The focus of the forum will be determined soon. 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 different boards, commissions, and committees to its standing committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their B/C/ or C's activities at CoA's monthly meetings.