



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

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

Date: March 1, 2022 (FY22 Second Quarter Report)

BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)

BCC Representative: Barbara Selter, Chair

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging (CoA) 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.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. A Commission alumnus is the Senior Fellow that staffs the Initiative, and individual CoA members participate on the various Committees. All have the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a community for a lifetime.

Covid-19

The Commission is proud that Montgomery County (MC) has one of the highest Covid-19 vaccination rates in the country. We are well aware of the hard work and infrastructure alliances that were required to achieve this goal. However, the Commission continues to monitor Covid-19's impact even as the County begins to open up and provide services in person. The Commission monitored which Senior Centers opened and what services were being provided and we were particularly relieved when lunches and activities were finally available in Senior Centers. These Senior Centers help alleviate social isolation and loneliness, which had gotten so much worse during the height of the Pandemic.

CoA Advocacy

Montgomery County Budget

- The CoA provided written and oral testimony on its budget priorities to the County Council.
- Under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), MC will receive about \$3.5 million for the Area Agency on Aging. The County assembled teams to develop spending proposals for focus areas including social isolation and meal expansion. The CoA strongly urged that ACCESS Hears be funded under ARPA as hearing impediments are a major cause of social isolation.

Thrive 2050

The CoA formed a task force to review Thrive 2050 and provide its input. Its recommendations will be completed early next year.

Legislative Breakfast

The Commission held its annual “Legislative Breakfast” on December 16 though the event was virtual, and breakfast was not served. The Commission’s presentations focused on the diverse constituency it serves. CoA presentations focused on the severe problem relating to the lack of surveys in nursing facilities, the difficulties with the Medicaid HCBS waiver program, and the needs of the “Gap” population (individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid, but do not have enough money to pay for private services.) The Legislative Briefing was very well attended, and the legislators appreciated both the opportunity to hear from and talk with the CoA.

Letters

- The Commission submitted a letter in support of a Holy Cross PACE Program.
- The Commission submitted comments to the FDA Commissioner on proposed rules for Establishing Over-the-Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids.
- The Commission submitted recommendations to the MC Department of Transportation on the future use of the Transportation Services Improvement Fund.

Assisted Living Regulations

The MD Department of Health conducted four virtual meetings on its draft assisted living regulations. A CoA representative participated in every meeting and offered both oral and written recommendations regarding the regulations. The protection of residents in assisted living facilities is very important and regulations must reflect the needs of the residents.

Nursing Home Surveys

Montgomery County is in a very difficult position regarding nursing facility surveys since the State cancelled a ten-year old Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that allowed for County staff to conduct nursing facility surveys. Without the MoU, nursing facility surveys are the responsibility of the state Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ), but under OHCQ only one complaint was investigated since July even though multiple complaints were submitted by the long-term care ombudsman program on behalf of residents, and two complaints regarding infection control were submitted by County sanitarians. There were no infection control or annual recertification surveys conducted. MC prepared a new MoU in which the County covers the entire cost of the surveys, but the State has not agreed to the new arrangement. The Commission is actively and strongly advocating for a resolution to this dire situation as follows:

- The Commission sent a letter to the Secretary of Health urging that the State sign the new MoU regarding nursing facility surveys in the County.
- The CoA gave a presentation on the lack of surveys and inspections of nursing facilities at its Legislative Breakfast.

County Recreation and Senior Centers

It is well established that social isolation is a serious problem for our elders. Recreation and senior centers, therefore, provide an extremely important service to these individuals. The CoA pays close attention to these Centers now that they have reopened as follows:

- The East County Recreation Center closed and activities for elders were moved to the Good Hope Community Center for activities and to the Praisner Center for exercise. The Commission continues to monitor how the move is working for older consumers.
- A COA representative was appointed to the County-wide Recreational Advisory Board.

CoA Education

It is important that Commissioners are up-to-date and knowledgeable about key issues, programs, and services regarding the older population. Thus, the Commission invites representatives of different programs to give presentations at its regularly scheduled meetings. This quarter, the CoA had presentations followed by lively question and answer sessions as follows:

- Medical Day Care (MDC) with Guest Speakers Elizabeth Barnes (Easter Seals) and Afshin Abedi (Loving Care MD) representing the MD Association of Adult Day Services. MDC in MD provides nursing facility level of care in the community and offers transportation, nutrition, activities, and physical and occupational therapies. There are 18 MDCs in Montgomery County. The speakers described financial issues that MDCs face and asked that the CoA advocate on the behalf of MDCs. The Commission will take up this request next year.
- Odile Brunetto, Chief, A&DS, gave a presentation on the responsibilities of MC Commissions and Task Forces.
- Dr. Patricia McGhee, Director of AAA, presents regularly at both the Executive Committee meeting and the monthly Commission meetings.
- Enricho Lachico, MC, gave a status report on nursing facility surveys.
- A Primer on HCBS in MC was presented by Jennifer Long and Shawn Brennan, A&D
- Meals and Wheels of Central Maryland made a presentation to the CoA Health and Wellness Committee.

Education works both ways and it is important that the CoA help to educate the public on issues, activities and programs involving our elders. During this fourth quarter, educational activities included:

- Developing an exciting new program entitled *Community for a Lifetime Awards* in which individuals may nominate a person or agency who has worked diligently to further the quality of life of our elders. Nominations will be reviewed by a panel of experts.
- Completing a new Briefing Book that provides an overview of the Commission and the issues surrounding older residents of MC. The Briefing Book was sent to the County Executive and the MC Council and is available to all online.
- Beginning work on the Commission's Public Forum that will be held on May 5 at the Gaithersburg Art Center and will be cohosted by the Gaithersburg Senior Advisory

Committee.

- Reviewing all County websites related to older adults to make sure that they are all up-to-date and accurate.

Also of Note

- Commissioner Ruby Moone was accepted into the 2021 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.
- The Commission nominated previous Commissioners Miriam Kelty and Odessa Shannon for the 2022 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.

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 activities at CoA's monthly meetings.