

COMMISSION ON AGING

May 27, 2021

Robin Riley, Director
Department of Recreation
Administration Office
2425 Reedie Drive, 10th Floor,
Wheaton, MD 20902

Dear Robin,

I am writing on behalf of the Commission on Aging (CoA) to address the recent announcement of the reopening on June 14th of two of the County's seven senior centers, Holiday Park and Damascus. We are pleased that this stage of post-pandemic operations has begun. The past year has been particularly challenging for older adults, many of whom have been isolated from friends and family. They are eager to return to their pre-pandemic activities, especially attendance at the programs offered by the senior centers.

The Commission supports reopening efforts that are carefully planned to ensure the safety and health of center participants. We appreciate and support the Recreation Department's cautious approach and its intention to ensure a safe environment for all. We note, however, that the other five senior centers will be open but used for other purposes that are not devoted to programming for older adults: the Wheaton and White Oak Senior Centers will continue to be COVID-19 vaccine sites; Long Branch Senior Center will continue to be a full-time homeless shelter; Margaret Schweinhaut and North Potomac Senior Centers will provide summer programming for hundreds of youth.

This situation is of concern to the CoA, and we would like to better understand why these facilities are deemed safe for other purposes but not the older adult programs they are designated to offer. While the alternative uses may be necessary, we are concerned that they are being offered at the expense of older adults who rely on senior centers for programming and social interaction. For many older adults, the virtual and outdoor programs planned by the Department simply are not an adequate substitute for the programs they are accustomed to within the facilities.

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging (COA), authorized by the Older Americans Act, was established by Montgomery County in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests and issues of older adult residents, and to be their advocates at the local, state and national levels.

In conclusion, we urge the Department to monitor events closely and to reopen the remaining centers to older adults as quickly as possible and to resume normal operations. We appreciate your attention to these issues and hope that all the senior centers will revert to their intended use as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

Barbara Selter sb

Barbara Selter, Chair
Commission on Aging

Department of Health and Human Services

401 Hungerford Drive, 4th Floor, Rockville, Maryland, 20850 240-777-1120, FAX 240-777-1436

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs