

THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION BOARD



Raise Your Voice!

TESS Center Focus Groups

September 25, 2015—**Seniors**

October 6, 2015—**ESOL Class Participants**

October 20, 2015—**Judy Center Parents and Caretakers**



¡Dé Su Opinión!

IMMIGRATION

- Streamline the citizenship and family reunification processes and support immigration reform
- Do not deport people based on minor offenses
- Continue support for citizenship and English classes
- Provide free legal services for citizenship process and ensure that people are aware of these services
- Open more services to undocumented residents, including Food Stamps, MA, and public education

HEALTH

- Provide dental, vision, mental health, and improved prescription coverage
- Provide training to staff helping residents apply for insurance
- Maintain support for programs providing medical coverage for children and low-income residents
- Increase support for free local clinics
- Form a senior advocacy group to fight for patient rights and better medical care
- Provide insurance for children and pregnant women, regardless of immigration status
- Offer more free health clinics
- Provide more information about health issues: nutrition, exercise, weight control, and Diabetes

CHILD CARE/EDUCATION

- Raise awareness of and reduce bureaucracy of child care voucher applications
- Increase income limits for child care and other supports to assist more families who are struggling but do not fall below the income cut-off
- Increase support for organizations like TESS and Judy Center that assist people applying for vouchers
- Address space limitations of Head Start/PreK in high-need areas so children do not need to travel
- Continue full support for ESOL programs, which are critical for children learning English
- Support ESOL programs for parents, which are offered at many schools
- Provide programs to prevent children from losing their native language

HOUSING

- Establish more affordable and accessible housing options and serve those most in-need first
- Improve communications about housing programs and assist with applications
- Adjust income guidelines so that more people are eligible for programs
- Inspect rental properties more frequently to ensure safe and sanitary living conditions
- Improve complaint process for landlord-tenant issues so that residents' complaints are not ignored and landlords make necessary repairs and ensure safety
- Provide a path to citizenship—documented residents have more housing options
- Simplify the mortgage application process

TRANSPORTATION

- Improve public transportation accessibility, especially on the weekends
- Provide free public transportation for seniors, disabled residents, and students, and reduced rates for shorter routes
- Increase the number of buses and add more direct routes
- Improve transportation for medical appointments
- Improve Metro Access so that it is more reliable

EMPLOYMENT

- Continue support for English classes, as language skills increase employment opportunities
- Provide more technology training so that low-income residents will be able to compete for more jobs
- Provide a path to citizenship—documented workers have more protections in the labor market
- Provide more information about employment rights/discrimination and ensure that labor laws are enforced and employees are not taken advantage of
- Improve communications about job openings
- Require employers to offer sick leave, medical coverage, and other benefits
- Allow undocumented residents who pay taxes to receive the Earned Income Tax Credit
- Provide assistance with online job applications
- Provide more and improve communications about career development/education programs

COMMUNICATIONS/OUTREACH

- Improve language access (especially Spanish and Amharic) for medical services, transportation, and County services and enhance communications for recent immigrant communities
- Send more information for seniors through the mail
- Improve communications from Consumer Protection, Rental Assistance, HOC, and Landlord-Tenant Affairs
- Create a public education campaign about fraud and scams targeting seniors
- Increase communications, including social media, to raise awareness of available services and programs, especially programs for qualifying low-income parents
- Create a community newspaper
- Support programs like the TESS Center that provide critical information to residents
- Address discrimination based on language, ethnicity or race by improving communications about basic rights
- Add staff to programs and provide customer service training to better serve the public
- Support programs for recent immigrants to learn about American culture

FINANCE/BANKING

- Reduce banking fees
- Provide more information about banking options
- Improve access to credit cards so that low-income people can qualify and build good credit
- Open community banks and credit unions with low interest rates

SERVICES

- Provide free computer courses in Spanish and other languages at libraries and other venues
- Offer more community events where residents can learn about services and receive information
- Offer more senior social programs to reduce isolation
- Increase police presence in communities, especially at night, and encourage people to report crime
- Enhance street lighting and assist residents in making their homes more secure and safe
- Offer more senior discounts for County services
- Offer daytime ESOL classes for low-income adults

Did You Know? In FY15, the TESS Center:

***Served over 8,900** walk-in clients in FY15 ***Provided 1,355** free summer meals to children

***Referred 380** clients to MANNA for emergency food support

***Provided free legal services to 533** residents through the Pro Bono Clinic

Feedback from the TESS Center Staff

- Undocumented clients face numerous obstacles: they cannot obtain work permits, employers take advantage of them, the citizenship process is long and expensive, they are ineligible for many emergency services, they cannot receive housing assistance and are therefore more likely to live in substandard housing.
- Space is very limited for many programs with wrap-around services, such as Families Foremost, Judy Center, and Montgomery Housing Partnership.
- While case managers are responsive to client needs, caseloads are so high that it may take some time to respond and process requests.
- While many training and educational programs can help residents achieve self-sufficiency, clients with child care and work responsibilities are struggling to make ends meet and cannot commit to these programs.
- There is a strong need for more/better dental coverage, vision coverage, and better prescription coverage.
- Fees for many services and programs are too high; guidelines should be reviewed to ensure that those most in need are reached.
- Child Care Vouchers pose many challenges: child support requirement is problematic for many clients, income eligibility is too low, and the fact that subsidies end when parents find work is difficult for low-income parents.
- Head Start/PreK part-day and part-year programs' service hours are too short for working parents. Children and families served by PreK require the same level of high-quality services which Head Start offers. Application requirements for PreK and Head Start can be daunting for parents.
- Affordable, safe, and sanitary housing is very difficult to find; HOC programs have many restrictions and long waiting lists.
- Program guidelines should take into account the actual cost of living in the County, which has increased drastically.
- There is a lack of preventative services to stop people from becoming homeless or facing other crisis situations.
- Seniors and parents with young children struggle with transportation; even basic tasks that require carrying packages or going to a doctor in another part of the County pose a challenge.

About the TESS Center

The Community Action Agency's TESS Center is a walk-in site serving Montgomery County residents. Its information and referrals, social service assistance, interpretation and translation, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and legal services are delivered in partnership with nonprofits, public agencies, and community groups. As one of the Neighborhood Opportunity Network sites in the community, the TESS Center aims to bring County programs and services to residents in a convenient, easy to find location.

THANK YOU!

The Community Action Board greatly appreciates the partnership of agencies and organizations which helped to plan, promote, and host the focus groups at TESS: IMPACT Silver Spring, the Judy Center, Aging and Disability Services, and the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity.

The Montgomery County Community Action Agency

Sharon Strauss, Executive Director
2424 Reddie Drive, Suite 238, Wheaton, MD 20902
240-777-1697 (main)/ 240-777-3295 (fax)/ MD Relay 711 (TTY Users)

The TESS Center

Maureen Larenas, Manager
8513 Piney Branch Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901
240-773-8260 (main)/ 240-565-5713 (fax)/ MD Relay 711 (TTY Users)



To request this information in alternative formats, please call 240-777-1697 or
e-mail Leah.Goldfine@montgomerycountymd.gov TTY users, please call MD Relay (711).

