



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Richard S. Madaleno
Chief Administrative Officer

MEMORANDUM

February 2, 2024

TO: Chris Cihlar, Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: Richard S. Madaleno, Chief Administrative Officer *BSM*

SUBJECT: Draft OLO Report 2023-14: Transgender Healthcare in Montgomery County

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of Legislative Oversight's (OLO) Draft Report 2023-14: Transgender Healthcare in Montgomery County.

Transgender healthcare is of significant importance, reflecting both the ethical imperative to provide equitable care and the broader goals of public health. Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right. Transgender individuals, like everyone else, deserve equitable access to quality healthcare that is respectful and affirming of their identities. Transgender individuals often experience health disparities, including higher rates of HIV, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Tailored healthcare can help reduce these disparities and improve overall health outcomes. Gender-affirming care, which may include hormone therapy or gender-confirmation surgeries, is essential for many transgender individuals. Access to these interventions is associated with improved mental health outcomes and an enhanced quality of life.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has actively engaged with the LGBTQ+ community through various initiatives and collaborations. A comprehensive survey, conducted in collaboration with the LGBTQ+ Community Liaison aimed to capture the diverse experiences and perspectives within the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2021, the DHHS established the annual *Pride in the Plaza* festival that takes place in Veterans Plaza. This festival fosters unity among LGBTQ+ community members through a day of arts, cultural activities, and access to LGBTQ+ focused health and wellness resources. The success of the festival, now in its third year, has led to plans for the fourth scheduled to take place on June 30, 2024.

Montgomery County Sexual Health & Wellness Services has implemented an active and multimedia LGBTQ+ centered sexual health and wellness campaign called "Do It For You, MC." Specifically focusing on LGBTQ+ communities of color, this campaign utilizes various channels, including bus ads, metro ads, social media platforms, websites, and radio and television advertising in English and Spanish. Efforts are underway to expand campaign materials to include more languages in the coming fiscal year.

In collaboration with the Office of Community Partnerships, we are developing a website, MontgomeryCountyPride.org, to consolidate LGBTQ+ focused resources, events, and information for the County. The website is set to launch on National Coming Out Day.

Partnerships have been formed with LGBTQ+ arts/culture organization Live in Your Truth (LIYT) and Mary's Center to provide on-site HIV/STI testing at LIYT Nights in Veterans Plaza. Held in May/June 2023, over 40 people tested at each event, and the series is planned to continue in 2024 leading up to Pride in the Plaza.

Additionally, the organization collaborated with Trans Maryland in support of the Maryland Trans Resilience Conference in June 2022, providing on-site services and event support at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The outreach team consistently delivers LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health and wellness education in all community-based testing encounters.

Lastly, a community-wide contest in collaboration with the Office of Community Partnerships resulted in the creation of Montgomery County's official pride decal. Youth and adult submissions were considered, and the final designs will be distributed starting on National Coming Out Day at the Pride in the Plaza event.

Although the report does not touch upon this aspect, we are considering the establishment of an LGBTQ+ health initiative akin to Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI), African American Health Program (AAHP) and Latino Health Initiative (LHI). Such an initiative could function as a central coordinating entity for resources, education, support, and grants. Presently, these efforts are housed within HIV/STI, and having a dedicated group supporting the LGBTQ+ community beyond just sexual activity would be valuable.

The draft report includes the following recommendations.

Recommendation # 1: Discuss options to require training for healthcare providers on LGBTQIA+ cultural competency to remain licensed, registered, or certified in the State of Maryland.

CAO Response:

We agree with this recommendation. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the LGBTQ Community Liaison will work with stakeholders including the LGBTQ Advisory Group to discuss options for amending state law to require training about LGBTQ+ cultural competency as a part of state healthcare licensing. We understand from the OLO report that there are two distinct types of education needed for healthcare providers: (1) medical education for appropriate clinical treatment for transgender individuals, and (2) cultural competence education on how to respectfully provide services (medical care and administrative) in a culturally sensitive manner. We will work to ensure that training covers these areas. The medical society typically objects to imposing particular mandates on the training of healthcare providers. It is not that the training itself is deemed inadequate; rather, it often becomes an additional obligation for providers to manage. Nevertheless, a few years ago, implicit bias and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training were sanctioned as mandatory for all healthcare professionals. Instead of introducing another separate requirement, proposing the integration of specific LGBTQ+ focused training into the existing framework might be a more effective approach. As recommended in the OLO report we will also work with stakeholders to create a publicly available list of healthcare providers in the County who affirmatively provide healthcare services for transgender individuals. Further, we wholeheartedly endorse the development of a directory featuring healthcare providers offering transgender services and those that are LGBTQ+ friendly. We suggest incorporating this initiative into a broader project focused on cataloging providers within our County.

Recommendation # 2: Discuss the need and feasibility of a dedicated, safe, and affirming space for the LGBTQIA+ community in the County.

CAO Response:

We agree with this recommendation. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the LGBTQ Community Liaison will work with stakeholders including the LGBTQ Advisory Group to discuss the feasibility of establishing an inclusive and welcoming center for the LGBTQ+ community. We will work collaboratively with LGBTQ+ community members and organizations to ensure that, as emphasized in the OLO report, the discussion of and work towards establishing and operating a center be inclusive, comprehensive, and actively involve all parts of the LGBTQ+ community. This work will include an intentional focus on the intersections of race, class, and gender identity within this community. We understand that this space is necessary to address the complex and critical needs of the LGBTQ+ community in Montgomery County.

We look forward to discussing these items at the Council work session.

RSM/cr

cc: Fariba Kassiri, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the County Executive
James Bridgers, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Kisha N. Davis, Health Officer, Department of Health and Human Services
Ken Hartman-Espada, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
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