

# Commission on Children and Youth

Annual Report

2017-2018



Montgomery County, Maryland  
Commission on Children and Youth

# Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

# Commission Structure

The Commission and its committees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Youth Advisory/Leadership Committee meets from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on the same evening. The Commission meetings are open to the public and are held at the Early Childhood Training Center located at 1401 Rockville Pike, Lobby Level, Rockville, MD 20852.

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat and selects priority issues for the year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2017-2018, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Assessing the resources and services available in Montgomery County to support the mental health and wellness of children and youth**
- **Addressing the needs of children and youth who are undocumented in Montgomery County**

The Commission hosts two major community events each year: Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, which allows the Commission, public officials, and the larger community to learn more about the experience and opinions of Montgomery County youth, and the Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which honors individuals and organizations that provide extraordinary service to the children and youth of our community.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 2:  
Mission & Structure

Page 3:  
Letter from the  
Chair

Page 5:  
Membership

Page 7:  
Recommendations

Page 9:  
Commission  
Activities

Page 12:  
2017-18  
Commission  
Priorities

# Letter from the Chair



November 1, 2018

**The Honorable Isiah Leggett  
Montgomery County Executive**

**The Honorable Hans Riemer, President  
Montgomery County Council**

**The Honorable Michael A. Durso, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education**

**Uma Ahluwalia, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services**

**Citizens of Montgomery County**

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Riemer, Mr. Durso, Ms. Ahluwalia and Citizens of Montgomery County,

The Commission on Children and Youth has completed another successful year exploring topics of importance to the County's children and youth in order to serve as advocates on their behalf. I was honored to serve as the Chair this past year and am pleased to share this year's Annual Report.

This past year, our work focused on two areas and subcommittees were formed to explore the topics, narrow our scope, and make recommendations for the needs of our county's children and youth. Our first subcommittee focused on the challenges related to undocumented youth in our county. This committee explored the various challenges that our undocumented children and youth face, some of which is just the stigma of their legal status. Second, our Wellness Committee focused on the mental well-being of the children and youth in our community. Our findings and recommendations are included with this report.

The Commission on Children and Youth had a very committed group of youth members this year. In celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr, Day of Service, they spearheaded an effort to create art therapy kits for distribution to children and youth who are newly arrived to the United States. Ultimately, they assembled over 200 packages and have distributed them to organizations supporting youth in Montgomery County.

In addition to our regular work, we continued our traditional signature events: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, MLK Day Of Service, and the Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards. In its 11<sup>th</sup> year, the Roundtable was hosted at the Silver Spring Civic Center for a discussion on concerns regarding undocumented youth, mental wellness, school climate as well as any other topics of concern. This forum is an evening dedicated to hearing directly from county youth. As is our custom, the youth commissioners completely facilitated the conversation

themselves while the adult community stakeholders listened. We always appreciate their candor and this year was no exception. More details on the Roundtable will be found later in this report.

To support the MLK Day of Service, held at the Bethesda North Marriott Conference Center, our youth commissioners planned a project around our wellness topic. They spent the morning helping volunteers pack self-care bags to be distributed to several local mental health nonprofits that serve children and youth.

The Commission held the 32nd Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The awards ceremony serves to acknowledge members of our community who provide outstanding service to youth in our county. We were fortunate to have an outstanding group of recipients and were honored to be able to celebrate their dedication to our county's children.

The Commission is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. Our goal is to ensure that all of our county's children and youth have the opportunities to live their best lives. We look forward to working with you again in the coming year and welcome your thoughts and input into how we can be most successful.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elizabeth McGlynn".

Elizabeth McGlynn  
Chair

## Membership 2017-2018

The Commission on Children and Youth has 27 membership positions including one representative from Montgomery County Public Schools; one representative from an independent school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

### Youth Representatives

Annieka Attah  
Serena Debesai  
Stella Masucci

William Chen  
Laura Espinoza  
Sinclair Redding

### Parent Representatives

Cecily Adams  
Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune  
Assya Pascalev

Shruti Bhatnagar  
Lynne Harris  
Eric Rossen

### Private Agency Representatives

Quajalyn Amos  
Kirsten Andersen  
Karen Duffy  
Elizabeth McGlynn

Chloe Perez  
Carolyn Tamarkin

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.  
YMCA Youth & Family Services  
EveryMind  
Girls on the Run  
of Montgomery County  
Hearts and Homes for Youth  
Montgomery County Collaboration  
Council

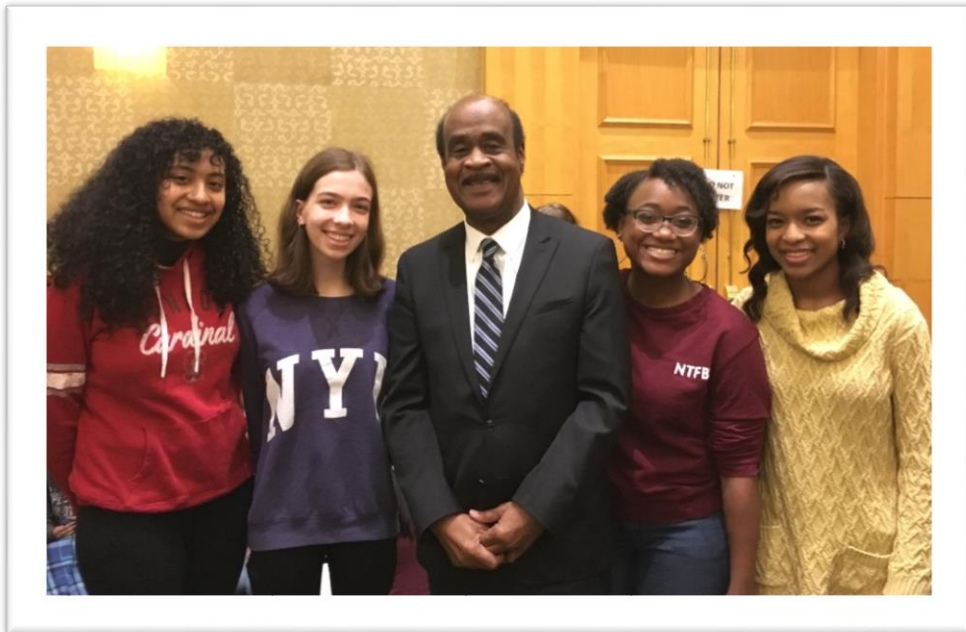
# Membership 2017-2018

## Public Agency Representatives

|                |                                                           |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Debra Iwanczuk | Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services |
| Jerome Jackson | Montgomery County Department of Recreation                |
| Rena McPherson | Montgomery County Public Schools                          |

## Commission Staff

|                |                                                                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Erin Stillwell | Program Manager, Early Childhood Services, Commission on Children and Youth |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|



*Mr. Leggett and youth members of the Commission on Children and Youth attending the 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service*

# Recommendations

## **RECOMMENDATION #1**

**Ensure that the youth serving organizations in Montgomery County, both public and private, invest in promoting the resiliency of youth and provide supports and education to youth of all ages and families that will increase their mental wellness.**

During the 2017-2018 year, the Mental Wellness Subcommittee of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth undertook to study the best methods to promote mental wellness for children and youth in Montgomery County. Different than addressing diagnosable mental health issues, the Commission focused on the broader concept of Mental Wellness due to its applicability to all youth and families in the county. Mental wellness focuses on promoting optimal functioning and increasing each person's ability to cope with normal stressors. The Commission reviewed current trends and data on the Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, heard from Commission members, and reviewed various programs and strategies to promote mental wellness. Because of the complex nature of the issue, the commission will continue to study mental wellness during the coming year with the goal of identifying specific strategies and methods that can be implemented in Montgomery County.

***Based on this research, the Commission submits the following preliminary recommendations:***

- a. Youth serving organizations should work together to provide educational materials to youth and caregivers about the importance of mental wellness. This could include teaching coping skills or mindfulness skills as well as education about common mental health issues experienced by youth.
- b. Increase the number of teachers, administrators, police officers, students, and parents who are trained in Mental Health First Aid.
- c. Create a school environment in which students have at least one caring adult that they can connect with to receive support.
- d. Work with families to reduce the stigma of mental health issues with the goal of increasing help seeking behavior and early intervention.

The Commission recognizes that several entities within the County are working to address mental health, trauma informed care, and mental wellness. The Commission would like to contribute to these continued efforts during the next year by developing specific recommendations that can increase each youth's mental wellness.

# Recommendations

## RECOMMENDATION #2

**Establish and widely publicize a one-stop resource tool for children, youth and families who are undocumented.**

During the 2017-18 year, the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth saw great value in identifying the needs of children and youth who are undocumented and living in Montgomery County. The Commission also reviewed the extent of services and programs available in Montgomery County to support these youth and their families.

As a result of the research, the Commission identified specific key resources areas that are imperative to help meet the needs of these youth and their families. The identified key resources areas are highlighted below:

- Employment
- Education
- Child Care
- Language Learning
- Healthcare
- Mental and behavioral health
- Housing
- Transportation
- Legal
- Emergency Basic Needs (Food/Shelter/Clothing)

***Based on this research, the Commission submits the following recommendation:***

- Establish and widely publicize a one-stop resource tool for children, youth and their families who are undocumented. ***MC311 is one such potential resource that could be bolstered and advertised.*** As County Executive Ike Leggett stated on [February 9, 2017](#) - *“We want you to simply go, if people need it — [call] 311. We have the resources and people there to answer the questions, and to assist and get them in the right directions”.* We encourage Montgomery County to make this or another such platform readily accessible to provide language accessible resources for children and youth in the core areas of need listed above.



# Commission Activities

## Guest Speaker Highlights

- Ms. Maritza Solano, Casa de Maryland
- Ms. Smita Varia, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- Dr. Jennifer Jones, MCPS School Counseling
- Dr. Nancy Carlson, American Counseling Center

## Testimony Highlights

- Letter to the Board of Education, April 2018

## Guest Speakers

- On February 21, 2018, the Commission welcomed Ms. Maritza Solano, Director of Education at Casa de Maryland. Ms. Solano shared information about the legal, healthcare and education services available to undocumented youth and their families.
- On March 14, 2018, Ms. Smita Varia, Program Manager with the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, presented to the Commission on Children and Youth information about the Family Justice Center and domestic violence resources. Ms. Varia also provided resources on healthy dating and promoted the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Choose Respect Conference.
- Dr. Jennifer Jones, MCPS School Counselor, and Dr. Nancy Carlson, retired MCPS School Counselor and current member of the American Counseling Center, joined the youth commissioners for a conversation about the complex roles of school counselors within Montgomery County Public Schools.

## Presentations and Testimony

- On October 18, 2017, the Commission participated in the HHS Committee roundtable discussion and communicated the top two policy priorities for the 2017-18 year.
- On April 12, 2018, the Commission transmitted a letter to the Montgomery County Board of Education commenting on the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Having A Voice Roundtable event. At this event MCPS students shared their personal experiences on school climate and concerns about lack of access to school-employed mental health professionals.

# Commission Activities

## Activity Highlights

- MLK Day of Service  
January 2018
- Youth Having a Voice Roundtable  
February 2018

### MLK Day of Service

On January 15, 2018, the Commission participated in the Montgomery County Volunteer Center MLK Day of Service at the Bethesda North Marriott Conference Center. Our youth commissioners, with the support of fellow adult commissioners, planned a service project focused around the topic of mental health and wellness. Working side by side with hundreds of eager volunteers, our commissioners packed over 200 self-care bags that were distributed to several local mental health nonprofits that serve youth in Montgomery County.



### Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its 11<sup>th</sup> annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on February 8, 2018 at the Silver Spring Civic Building. A diverse group of students from local secondary schools joined us for a profound discussion on mental health, school climate, and the experiences of youth who are undocumented in Montgomery County.

The youth commissioners developed the questions and facilitated the roundtable discussion. The youth participants were encouraged to be honest and their responses were both informative and reflective. Their candid answers provided adults in the room insights into youth experiences in Montgomery County.

Many youth in the room bravely shared their experiences about the stressors they encounter on a daily basis and ways they have found to manage their stress at home and school. Talking to a trusted adult emerged as a method to alleviate their stress, however the students unanimously reported a perceived inaccessibility of mental health support staff at school. Some students reported that their school counselors were overwhelmed and often unavailable. Others noted discomfort sharing personal problems with teachers or other staff without having an established level of trust. No students identified other school-employed mental health professionals, such as school psychologists or pupil personnel workers, as resources available to them, as students likely remain unaware of their existence. Further, the students highlighted the many logistical and financial barriers to accessing mental health supports outside of school, despite an interest and desire to receive such services.

Activity Highlights

- 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards May 2018

# Commission Activities

## Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

On May 23, 2018 the Commission hosted its 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards at the Gilchrist Auditorium on the Rockville Campus of Johns Hopkins University. The Commission was privileged to once again present six awards to individuals and organizations whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth made a difference in the lives of others. The Commission was honored to have Mr. Charles Short, Special Assistant to the County Executive, kick off the evening! The extremely talented young performer, Ms. Anna Grace Wilson from Rocky Hill Middle School, provided an unforgettable musical performance at the celebration.

The award is named in honor of Dr. Nancy Dworkin, past chairperson for the Commission on Children and Youth who passed away in 1987. Dr. Dworkin was the Director of the Center for Unique Learners and her upbeat instructional philosophy focused on “teaching to strength” and encouraging all students to develop skills that would maximize their potential. Dr. Dworkin’s philosophy is echoed in the Commission’s purpose for establishing this Awards Program—encouraging each person to reach their own potential for providing service to others.

## 2018 Outstanding Service to Youth Awardees



*Photos courtesy of Mr. Chaminda Hangilipola, Montgomery Blair High School*

*(Photo 1: Patricia Rumbaugh, Let’s Play America, Volunteer Award Recipient photographed with Elizabeth McGlynn, Commission Chair, & Laura Espinoza, Youth Commissioner Photo 2: Joseph Hooks, 480 Club LLC, Organization Award Recipient photographed with Annieka Attah, Youth Commissioner & Elizabeth McGlynn Photo 3: Thomas Ransom, Market President, BB&T Bank, Business Award Recipient photographed with Stella Masucci, Youth Commissioner & Elizabeth McGlynn Photo 4: Julie Tannen-Stevens, MCPS School Counselor, Service Provider Award Recipient photographed with Serena Debesai, Youth Commissioner & Elizabeth McGlynn Photo 5: Ivana Samuels, Youth Award Recipient photographed with William Chen, Youth Commissioner and Elizabeth McGlynn)*

## 2018 Butterfly Award for Outstanding Service to Youth



*The 2018 Butterfly Award was presented to the young men and women from the BROTHERS-SHOUT youth organization in recognition for their outstanding volunteer service in the community*

# Commission Priorities for 2018-19

Our top priority is to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and furthermore, work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures.

The Commission is working to affirm the needs, aspirations and achievements of all the County's young people through these two priorities:

## Priority 1:

**In today's environment, our students experience stress from a variety of sources whether it's due to poverty, school or home environment, cultural expectations or other external or internal sources. The Commission wants to explore ways to promote a positive approach to mental health and wellbeing that is accessible to a wide variety of the community.**

## Priority 2:

**The Montgomery County Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution focused on the safety of students and staff. Similarly, the State of Maryland passed the *Safe to Learn Act* in 2018. The Commission is concerned about a) balancing psychological and physical safety in Montgomery County schools, and b) providing a safe environment for students during non-instructional hours, including after school activities on campus. The Commission will examine current initiatives, supports, and services in order to identify gaps, opportunities, and recommendations.**

**Isiah Leggett, County Executive**  
**Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director of Health and Human Services**  
**JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services**



**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Children, Youth and Families Services**  
**Commission on Children and Youth**  
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**Rockville, Maryland 20855**  
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**For more information about the Commission on Children and Youth, please visit:**  
**[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccy](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccy)**

*Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.  
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.*

*Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission/access to its programs and services.*