



COMMISSION ON AGING

June 25, 2019

The Honorable Larry Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

I write today on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging to appeal for additional funding for social worker positions in Montgomery County's Adult Protective Services (APS) and Public Guardianship programs.

The Commission on Aging was established in 1974 to advise the Montgomery County government on the needs, interests, and issues of older adults, and to advocate on their behalf at the local, state, and federal levels. Our work is ever more significant as our older adult population continues to grow and to become more diverse. A primary area of our concern is protection and support for vulnerable and older adults.

In recent years, Maryland has made great strides in strengthening services and protections for vulnerable adults through laws, training, education, and creation and funding of services and programs. Despite these efforts, incidents of elder abuse and financial exploitation continue to rise. As of April 2019, with two months still left in FY19, Montgomery County APS had investigated more than 1,000 elder/vulnerable adult abuse cases, almost double the 592 investigations conducted just seven years ago, in FY12.

The number of investigations involving financial exploitation has increased even more dramatically - from 16% of APS cases in FY12 to 35% of cases in FY19. This increase is due in large part to laws requiring financial institutions to report suspected financial exploitation of an elder or vulnerable adult. Financial exploitation investigations can be complex, time consuming, and resource intensive. Many investigations result in litigation and the court appointment of a guardian of the property. The number of court cases involving financial exploitation has more than doubled since FY13 - with an average of nearly 25 successful guardianship of property cases filed annually.

APS works hand-in-hand with the Public Guardianship Program, which provides substitute decision-making for adults whom the court has determined lack the capacity to make their own decisions about essential aspects of their lives (*e.g.*, housing, safety, or medical care) and for whom there is no less restrictive alternative, including no appropriate family member or other loved one to serve in this role. As an indicator of the growing need for such services, public guardianship cases have increased 60% from FY12 to FY19.

Department of Health and Human Services

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The Public Guardianship program also provides services to continuing APS clients who are not under guardianship, conducts guardianship assessments after receiving referrals from hospitals, and provides services to clients of the Social Services to Adults program.

Almost 15% of Montgomery County's more than one million residents are 65 years of age or older; 2.1% are age 85 or older. We expect that by 2030, approximately 20% of our residents will be 65+, and that we will see an above average increase in our 85+ population. Other trends include a rise in the number of older residents who are foreign born and may be isolated by language or culture; and a decline in traditional social supports and increased family mobility resulting in more social isolation. All of these trends have the potential for increasing the risk of elder abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation.

Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardianship Program are state-mandated programs that cannot be curtailed. Without additional state funding to support them, the County will be forced to reallocate resources from critical safety net or preventive programs, or to focus resources on only the most severe cases, thereby placing at risk other vulnerable adults who may be victims, or at risk of becoming victims, of abuse or neglect. To avoid such a result, we respectfully request that the Governor's FY21 budget for Montgomery County include funding for additional Social Worker positions in the Adult Protective Services and Public Guardianship programs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Jean Dinwiddie, Pharmacy D.
Chair, COA

cc: Lourdes R. Padilla, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Dr. Raymond Crowell, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Nancy Navarro, Council President
Gabriel Albornoz, Councilmember, Chair, HHS Committee
Evan Glass, Councilmember
Craig Rice, Councilmember
Odile Brunetto, Acting Chief, Department of Health and Human Services, Director, Area Agency on Aging
Leslie Frey, Department of Health and Human Services
Mario Wawruzusin, Department of Health and Human Services