

# Commission on Aging Montgomery County, Maryland 2021 Annual Report



Department of Health and Human Services  
May 2022



## ***Montgomery County Commission on Aging 2021 Annual Report***

### **Enabling Legislation**

The Commission on Aging was established by Montgomery County in 1974 pursuant to a requirement of the Federal *Older Americans Act* of 1965, that there be an Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging. (42 U.S.C. Sec. 3001 et. seq.; MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34.) In creating the Commission, the Council declared:

*It is hereby declared to be the public policy of the County to promote and initiate programs to improve conditions of the aging or elderly in the County; to work toward elimination of restrictions which impede older citizens from full participation in the mainstream of community life; and to assist and stimulate all levels of government and the community to be more responsive to the needs of the County's older citizens.*

Among the powers granted to the Commission are the following:

*(f) To study and investigate by means of public or private meetings, conferences and public hearings, conditions which may result in unmet needs or in discrimination or prejudice because of age.*

*(g) To advise and counsel the residents of the County, the County council, the County executive and the various departments of County, State and Federal governments on matters involving the needs of the aging, and to recommend such procedures, programs or legislation as it may deem necessary and proper to promote and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all persons, regardless of their age.*

*(h) To work to remove the unmet needs or discrimination or prejudice on the basis of age in such areas as housing, recreation, employment, education, community services and related matters. (MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34)*

### **Commission Membership**

The County Code requires that the Commission include at least 18 members appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Council. Members must be County residents, and a majority must be age 60 and older. Members are to include: those who participate in or who are eligible to participate in programs under the *Older Americans Act*; local elected officials or their designees; individuals who are or who have been active in government, business, industry, labor, community service, religious, social services, education, and representatives of major organizations or agencies concerned with aging.

### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

The Commission collaborates with other Boards, Committees, Commissions, and stakeholder groups. Several such entities send liaisons to Commission meetings, and some Commission members serve as liaisons to other Boards, Committees and Commissions. The Commission looks for opportunities to collaborate with other groups on common issues. In addition, most Commission members are active in other organizations supporting services for older adults.

*Letter from the Chair*



**The Honorable Marc Elrich**  
**The Honorable Gabe Albornoz**

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging is pleased to provide its Annual Report for 2021. The Report describes the key activities of the Commission as an advisor to County officials and as the Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging as mandated by the *Older Americans Act*. The Commission also serves as an effective advocate for the interests and concerns of the County's older adults and their families.

In 2021, despite the continuing challenges presented by the global pandemic, the Commission continued to monitor the County's progress in achieving the goals and vision of the *Senior Agenda: A Community for a Lifetime*. We were honored to have then-Council Vice President Gabe Albornoz speak at a Commission meeting and we were pleased that some of the Commission's budget priorities were included in the FY23 County Operating Budget. We thank the County Executive and County Council for your initiatives and support of older adults.

The Commission's significant activities in 2021 included:

- Conducting a well-attended virtual public forum, *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*.
- Producing a *Fact Sheet on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults* and a *Resources List*, which was released to the public so that ramifications of social isolation would be more widely understood.
- Completing and distributing the Final Report of the CoA Task Force on Racial Equity, Dementia Services and Policing.
- Hosting a virtual Legislative Breakfast for members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the State's General Assembly.
- Meeting individually through Zoom with members of the County Council to advocate for older adult programming and resources.
- Testifying twice before the County Council in support of the CoA's budget priorities on issues affecting older adults.
- Advocating for the resolution of serious difficulties that the County faces due to the termination of a Memorandum of Understanding with the State that had enabled County staff to conduct surveys and investigations of County nursing facilities.

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- Advocating for increased and improved home- and community-based services for older Americans under Medicaid, as well as older Americans who are not eligible for Medicaid, but who struggle to make ends meet.
- Establishing a new standing Communications Committee.
- Developing an exciting new awards program entitled, *Community for a Lifetime Awards*, for a person or agency who has worked diligently to further the quality of life of our older adults.
- Developing a “buddy system,” revising the Orientation Handbook, and creating a new orientation training program for new Commissioners.
- Presenting a new advocacy training session that addressed letter writing and advocacy.
- Revising the existing Commissioner Handbook and Briefing Book.
- Working with Access HEARS staff to create a proposal for a Montgomery County pilot to support enhanced hearing services to low-income seniors.
- Collaborating with the Age-Friendly Montgomery Home- and Community-Based Services Work Group to host a series of round tables on enhancing the direct care workforce.

While budget recommendations in 2021 focused on continuing to improve and enhance both current programs and new efforts, we remain sensitive to economic issues affecting the County. The disbursement of *American Rescue Plan Act* funds offered more opportunity for programs for older adults in Montgomery County.

The Aging in Community and Health and Wellness Committees explored topics with invited experts to gain additional knowledge to identify what areas should be further investigated and/or recommended for Commission action and advocacy. The Public Policy Committee monitored relevant County and State bills and sent letters of support as appropriate including letters to the State Department of Health and the Department of Transportation on issues of concern to older citizens. The new Communications Committee identified a new host and new name for its public access cable program, *50+ in Montgomery County*, and revised several CoA documents.

We could not have accomplished all that without the support of County staff. In this regard, we express our deep appreciation to DHHS Director Raymond Crowel. In addition, it is with great respect and admiration that we acknowledge the wise counsel and outstanding support and guidance of Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief of Montgomery County’s Aging and Disability Services, and Dr. Patrice McGhee, Director of Montgomery County’s Area Agency on Aging. The following AAA staff also provide outstanding assistance to the Commission: Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator; Shawn Brennan, Mobility and Transportation Manager; Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Coordinator; and Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator. Their contributions are invaluable to the Commission and to the well-being of all older adults in the County.

The Commission looks forward to engaging with you on matters that significantly affect the quality of life of the County’s older adult residents and their families.

Respectfully,

Barbara Selter, Chair

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**Commission Officers**

Barbara Selter, Chair  
Edgar Rivas, Vice Chair  
Janice Zalen, Secretary  
Richard Jourdenais, Budget and Finance Advisor

**Committee Chairs**

Aging in Community: Wayne Berman and Monica Schaeffer  
Health and Wellness: Neal Brown and Marsha Weber  
Public Policy: Morris Klein and Ryan Wilson  
Communications: Jean Dinwiddie and Beverly Rollins

**Task Force Leaders**

Dementia, Policing, and Racial Equity: Karen Maricheau and Jean Dinwiddie  
Social Isolation: Maritza Rivera and David Engle  
Transportation: Wayne Berman  
Thrive 2050: Wayne Berman

**Commission Members**

Wayne Berman, Neal Brown, Virginia Cain, Elizabeth Carrier, Jean Dinwiddie, Joyce Dubow, David Engel, Nkiru Ezeani, Mona Grieser, Richard Jourdenais, Morris Klein, Kendall Matthews, Nanine Meiklejohn, Ruby Moone, Sibon Neube, Karon Phillips, Helen Pross, Edgar Rivas, Maritza Rivera, Beverly Rollins, , Monica Schaeffer, Barbara Selter, Ann M. Serafenas, Katie Smith, Mary Sweeney, Tho Tran, Hillery Tsumba, Marsha Weber, T. Ryan Wilson, Arthur Williams, Janice Zalen

**Staff**

Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging and Disability Services; Dr. Patrice McGhee, Director, Area Agency on Aging; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator; Shawn Brennan, Mobility and Transportation Program Manager; Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Coordinator; Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator

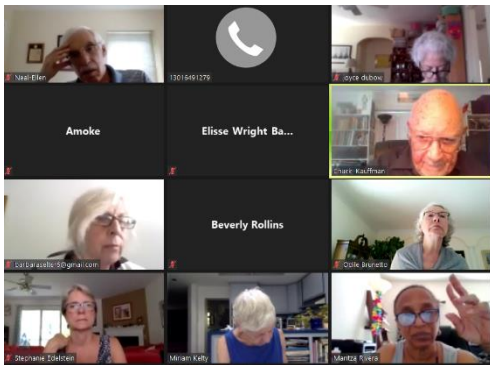
**Liaisons**

Monique Gardner, African American Health Program, Denise Israel, Montgomery County Department of Transportation; Betty Lam, Montgomery County Office of Community Affairs; Leslie Marks, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs; Aseem Nigam, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs; Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery; Jim Resnick, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue; Robin Riley, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Stacey Sigler, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Sara Swarr, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Arlee Wallace, African American Health Program; Tiffany Ward, Montgomery County Racial Equity Program

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### 2021 Commission on Aging Accomplishments

- Through the use of Zoom and conference calls, the CoA continued to meet and advocate for issues facing older adults in Montgomery County even during the throes of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- The CoA continued to identify, monitor, and develop solutions to problems that older adults face because of the COVID-19 crisis.
- The CoA established a new Communications Committee to raise awareness of both the CoA and County programs for older adults.
- The Health and Wellness Committee developed a “Hearing Loss Fact Sheet” that was distributed to individuals throughout Montgomery County and worked with staff from Access HEARS to develop a pilot proposal for hearing assistance for County older adults.
- The CoA hosted a virtual Legislative Breakfast for members of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly.
- The CoA lobbied for resources to be included in the County budget for: two additional social worker positions in HHS, one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship Program; legal assistance for older adults to avoid eviction from their homes; expanding senior nutrition programs; increasing funds to raise awareness of older adult services; expanding the Housing Initiative Fund; maintaining and expanding senior adult programs; expanding home- and community-based services to more older adults in the County including residents who are ineligible for Medicaid; funding the Access HEARS Program which would help to supply hearing devices and support to lower income residents; and restoring cuts to the Escorted Transportation Program administered by the Jewish Council for the Aging and expanding financial eligibility for the service.
- Members met individually (virtually) or via conference call with members of the County Council to advocate for older adult programming and resources.



- The Commission Chair testified twice before the County Council through Zoom calls in support of the CoA’s budget priorities on issues affecting older adults.
- The Commission advocated to the County Executive, County Councilmembers, and members of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly for the resolution of problems facing the County due to the termination of the Memorandum of Understanding with the State that enabled County staff to conduct inspections and investigate complaints in nursing facilities within Montgomery County.
- The CoA sent several letters to State and local legislators in support of laws, programs, and services affecting older adults.



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### **COVID-19 and Combatting Social Isolation**

Montgomery County has one of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the country. The Commission is well aware of the hard work and infrastructure alliances that were required to achieve this goal and we applaud both County and State efforts. The Commission continued its COVID-19 efforts, even as the County began to open and provide services in person as follows:

- Five Commissioners, Barbara Selter, Edgar Rivas, Rev. Dr. Ruby Moone, Tho Tran, and alumni member, Revathi Vikram, participated in a brief video that encouraged Montgomery County citizens to get vaccinated. The video provided vaccination messaging in English, Spanish, Hindi, and Vietnamese. It was played on the County public access television station and was posted to YouTube.
- The Commission monitored (1) how many older adults received vaccinations, (2) how many home-bound individuals received vaccines, and (3) what outreach efforts were underway to vaccinate older adults of color. Once the County began to open and to provide services in person, the Commission monitored 1) which senior centers were open, and 2) what services were being provided. We were particularly relieved when lunches and activities finally were available in senior centers. These senior centers are important places to help alleviate social isolation and loneliness, which had gotten so much worse during the height of the pandemic.

The worrisome increase in social isolation and loneliness during the pandemic resulted in the Commission forming a Task Force on Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors to address this issue. The Task Force performed research on this important concern and held a public forum for older adults and their service providers on May 18, 2021. The theme of the public forum was *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*. In the forum follow-up, the CoA developed and released a *Fact Sheet on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults* and a *Resources List*.

### **Commission on Aging Budget Priorities**

The CoA develops annual budget priorities that take into consideration the mission as set forth in the enabling legislation, as well as information and data from County agencies, elected officials, and outside experts.

### **Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Priorities**

Fiscal Year 2022 budget priorities included:

- Adult Protective Services/Public Guardianship – add two social worker positions.
- Provide legal information and/or assistance to renters who are at risk of eviction.
- Expand senior nutrition programs.
- Develop a campaign to advertise County services for older adults.
- Maintain the Housing Initiative Fund.
- Maintain and expand older adult programs

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### **Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities**

Fiscal 2023 budget priorities included:

- Fund the expansion of in-home care to more older County residents, including those who do not qualify for State programs.
- Increase staffing to improve the timeliness and quality of assessments that determine eligibility to receive HCBS services.
- Increase funding to help market/promote services available for older adults.
- Fund the Access HEARS Program.
- Restore cuts to the Escorted Transportation Program.
- Expand funding for the Housing Initiative Fund.
- Fully fund the Licensure and Regulatory Nursing Home Inspections Program.
- Funding for a full time Facilitator for the Age-Friendly Montgomery Initiative.

### **Area Agency on Aging**

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is responsible for the provision of the continuum of home and community-based services and provides staff support to the Commission on Aging. In conjunction with community partners, the AAA is involved in administering County and State grant awards to contractors for services, public education/outreach, networking, and referrals.

AAAs were established under the Federal *Older Americans Act* in 1973 to respond to the needs of Americans ages 60 and older in every local community. The AAA serves as the local entity that administers a far-reaching suite of programs and services to help older adults choose the home and community-based services and living arrangements that suit them best. The AAA is part of a national network of over 670 AAAs established under the *Older Americans Act* to improve the quality of life for older persons by a network that maintains a holistic view of aging. The AAAs are mandated to "foster the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated systems to serve older individuals..."

### **Highlights of AAA Activities in Fiscal Year 2021**

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, FY21 required service delivery adjustments to ensure the safety of clients and staff. The AAA pivoted as necessary in alignment with State requirements to both reestablish reentry of in-person services and continue ongoing virtual services. Amid the uncertainty of increased positivity rates and new variants that changed COVID protocols regularly the AAA continued to serve the most vulnerable with compassion and heartfelt dedication. The AAA could not provide needed services to older adults if not for our robust and dedicated provider network. In addition, the AAA continues to work closely with our peers and allies in HHS to ensure all-encompassing service delivery and to provide credible and timely communication to the older adults in our community. The program highlights demonstrate the resiliency of AAA staff during FY21 and FFY21.

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- The Aging and Disability Services' Maryland Access Point answered 16,439 calls to assist seniors, persons with disabilities, and their families to provide access to information and needed short- and long-term care services offered both by the County and our non-profit partners.
- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) continued into the highest levels of COVID. The ombudsman activities were curtailed to be primarily virtual which limited the amount of time in the field and direct contact with individual residents. The group interactivities of the residents were suspended due to outbreaks of the virus. The ombudsman program was vigilant in researching and providing information regarding the most current and up-to-date information provided by CMS and CDC on the outbreaks and activities which could be conducted. There were 27 cases opened and 74 cases closed with a resolution rate of 92%. The ombudsman program has documented there were 710 information & assistance consultations with facility staff, and 917 information & assistance consultations with individuals. The ombudsman program members participated in 7 surveys being conducted by the licensing agency. The ombudsman program conducted 6 training sessions for facility staff on resident rights. During this time in the pandemic, the ombudsman program made 2 complaint visits, one of which involved an emergency relocation of an assisted living due to the Immediate Jeopardy findings of OHCQ that there were no qualified caregivers on site. During the County FY21 there are 61 routine access visits conducted by members of the ombudsman program. Every October there is a nationwide celebration of Resident Rights month. The ombudsman program prepared materials which were distributed to all the nursing homes and assisted living facilities. During this time, the ombudsman program advocated strongly for the county to retain local licensing presence for nursing homes, however, the state Office of Healthcare Quality prevailed and that function was transferred to the state agency at the end of the County FY21 reporting period. During the County FY21, the interest of active volunteers began to subside. There were retirements of both volunteers and experienced staff members out of the program. Many cited their concern for personal safety and health during the pandemic if required to conduct on-site visitation. Once positivity and transmission rates decreased in the county, during the fourth quarter of FY21 the LTCO started provided in-person/ in-facility visits on a limited as needed basis.
- The Public Guardianship Program served 60 persons in need of protective services (as determined by the courts), conducted telephone monitoring of clients with facility staff, or did virtual visits, until in person visiting was once again allowed only a few short months ago. Additionally, the Program conducted 9 education and training events virtually for new staff, and nursing home and hospital case managers. The Public Guardianship Program helped residents avoid 23 cases due to preventative assessments and education. COVID-19 continued to affect all aspects of our work. After all clients were vaccinated and boosted, it was clear the vaccines were effective in preventing illness and hospitalization. We only lost one client to COVID this fiscal year.
- The Senior Nutrition Program began reopening congregate dining programs in the summer of 2021. A few locations remain closed, overall, the congregate program served more than 1,650 seniors over 30,000 meals during FFY21. The home-delivered meal program served over 3,000 seniors more than 500,000 meals. The grab-n-go meal program instituted in 2020 as a

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response to COVID was directed to end at all locations by the July 2021. However, congregate dining sites in five senior housing sites operated by the Housing Opportunities Commission requested permission to stay on the boxes of seven frozen meals per week (delivered by Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland and funded by the Senior Nutrition Program). This is out of HOC's concern for resident safety because each of these sites have participating seniors who have refused to be vaccinated. The Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese programs are providing restaurant meals in partnership with local restaurants. Existing home-delivered meal providers operated as usual, with an uptick in the number of seniors requesting services.

- The Mobile Dentist was serving participants with the Montgomery County Senior Centers to provide on-site preventive screenings and basic dental care, using the Mobile Dentist custom-built motor coach at the six senior centers. Services includes comprehensive oral examinations (diagnostic x-rays, oral cancer screening, gum disease evaluation, examination of tooth decay and existing restorations) and advanced x-rays to determine abscesses and cysts, bone loss, cancerous and non-cancerous tumors, poor tooth and root positions and problems. Total number of participants receiving dental services at Senior Centers: 111.
- The Assessment, Evaluation, and Review Services (AERS) unit continues to provide comprehensive assessments to residents that are eligible to receive services in the Home Community Based programs. During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency the team of Registered Nurses (not fully staffed) were able to conduct an average of 272 assessments per month in 2020 and an average of 256 assessments per month in 2021. Also, part of the Registered Nurse team was deployed to participate in COVID Outbreak Surveillance in the DDA Group Home community and assisted PHS provide COVID vaccines in the community.
- The AAA provides nurse monitoring services (via its contract partners) to more than 2,650 Community First Choice Program (CFC) participants. The AAA Supports Planning Agency (SPA) serves a total of 310 individuals in the Community Options Waiver, Community First Choice and Community Personal Assistance Services programs. All services mentioned are Medicaid funded.
- In 2021, after COVID vaccinations were available, and Recreation centers opened, Bone Builders began offering in person classes. Throughout the FY the number of in person classes held increased, in total 11 in person classes were held There were 7 virtual classes that continued to meet as well. Total unique participants served in 2021 was 840, between all classes, in person and virtual. Evidenced Based Health Promotion classes began virtually with Chronic Disease Management, Diabetes Education and Powerful Tools for Caregivers. We served a total of 155 people.
- The Mobility and Transportation program manager participates in the County's Vision Zero traffic safety initiative and serves on the County's Fatal Crash Review Team, offering perspective on issues related to aging and disability in crash analyses. To ensure access for older adults to vaccination clinics and testing sites, the Mobility and Transportation program coordinated with taxi companies and non-profit partners.

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- Since 2014 the Villages program has expanded to include over 30 villages. During COVID, villages responded to their members needs by pivoting to online events and programs and many kept up their in-person volunteer services. Villages distributed PPE, shared critical information related to the pandemic with their community members, helped with testing and vaccine access and invested in friendly phone check ins with isolated members
- The Caregiver Support program facilitated an Elder Safe workshop in March titled CESLC Insider: Caring for A Loved One with Dementia. Engage@HOME, a YouTube channel from Montgomery County's Caregiver Support program, allows viewers an opportunity to discover trusted information, quality social engagement, inspiring health and wellness programs, arts and cultural activities and caregiver resources to help county residents maintain resilience. Engage@HOME has reached 18,664 views so far. In FY21 there were 36 caregiver virtual events including 65 workshops and fairs. The Caregiver Support program has also sent out over 1,205 caregiver relation resources, brochures, and printings. The Caregiver eNewsletter currently has 6,514 subscribers.
- In the County's sixth year as an official AARP Age-Friendly community, the Senior Fellow for Age-Friendly Montgomery (AFM) facilitated the growth of the program by: continued planning for quarterly meetings for both the 10 AFM work group co-leaders and AFM Advisory group; increased outreach with presentations on the Commission on Aging's cable television show, 50+ in Montgomery County and with AARP Maryland and other state and local organizations; planning for two first annual regional Age-Friendly events with other Age-Friendly localities and the George Washington University's Center for Health, Humanities, and Aging; and conducted initial planning for joint outreach and communication efforts in collaboration with the County's Commission on Aging.

### **Commission on Aging Background**

#### **Older Adults in Montgomery County**

The Commission's work is ever more significant as the older adult population continues to grow. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in the County. By 2040 the Montgomery County older adult population (age 60+) is projected to increase from 233,592 to 315,666, an increase of 35 percent. Life expectancy is also increasing, with the population of older adults age 85+ expected to increase by approximately 77 percent between 2019 and 2030.

The older adult population of Montgomery County is also growing more diverse. Approximately 15 percent of residents age 60 and older are Asian; 14 percent are Black or African American; and 9 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 37 percent of County residents age 60+, the majority of whom are women, live alone.

The County is also home to significant numbers of low- and moderate-income older adults: 12 percent of households headed by an individual age 60+ have income less than 150 percent of poverty or \$18,210 per year for a single person. Housing costs are an issue, particularly for

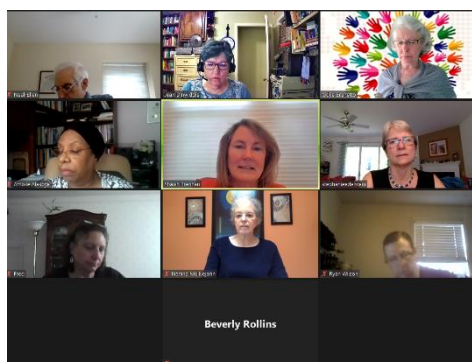
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renters. For 24 percent of senior homeowners, housing costs exceed 30 percent of their income; 56 percent of senior renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Looking at the income that older adults need to live independently in Montgomery County, the monthly figure for a renter is \$33,840 a year (37 percent higher than the national average), \$44,268 a year for an individual with a mortgage (40 percent higher than the national average), and \$26,568 a year for an individual without a mortgage (31 percent higher than the national average).

In 2019, 21 percent of older adults living in the community reported having at least one physical disability. Many may require case management, transportation, in-home assistance, dental services, congregate and home-delivered meals, or other services. Respite care is often needed when the older adult lives with a caregiver.

### CoA Organization and Core Activities

Commission activities include monthly meetings of the full Commission, the Executive Committee, and each of the four standing committees: Aging in Community, Health and Wellness, Public Policy, and Communications. In addition, the CoA convenes task forces to deal



with specific issues. Committees explore topics and issues within their scope and identify challenges and gaps in services and supports. These issues may include such things as budget requests for programs for older adults or advocating at the County- or State-level for laws, services, or programs. The committees often present their research to the full Commission for consideration for further action. The CoA also engages in concentrated studies of other age-relevant issues, which in recent years have included affordable housing, hearing loss, and making home- and community-based services more

available to both Medicaid-eligible individuals and individuals who are not Medicaid-eligible but struggle financially. Focus or task groups are created as needed to examine discrete issues such as social isolation, racial equity, dementia services and policing, and transportation.

The CoA also co-produces the monthly public access cable television program, *50+ in Montgomery County* (previously *Seniors Today*), which informs the community about issues, programs, and activities for older adults. In 2021, after much research and input, the CoA voted to change the name of the monthly program from *Seniors Today* to *50+ in Montgomery County*. Additionally, Commission member Katie Smith took over hosting the program, which is broadcast several times each month and is available for online viewing.

All CoA meetings are open to the public. In addition, to help inform the Commission's priorities and advocacy, full Commission and committee meetings frequently include invited guests who share their expertise on important topics. Representatives from other Montgomery County Commissions, Boards, Committees, Departments, and Agencies, and interested stakeholders also attend meetings. Several Commissioners serve as liaisons to other relevant organizations and groups.

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Commissioners are in frequent contact with the County Executive, County Councilmembers, department directors and staff, State and Federal legislators, members of the public, and others to advance programs, services, and policies on behalf of County older adults. At the County level, the CoA provides oral and written testimony on legislative, budget, and program issues and priorities pending before the County Council. In addition, CoA members meet with the County Executive, members of the Council, and Executive Branch directors; have ongoing communication with department staff; and collaborate with other County Boards, Committees, Commissions, and stakeholders on issues of mutual interest. CoA members also engage with non-profit partners, private sector groups, and other stakeholders to identify challenges and develop solutions.



At the State level, the CoA responds to proposed legislation in the General Assembly and communicates with relevant State agencies and members of the Montgomery County delegation on issues of concern to older adults in the County. Members also testify at County and State hearings. This year, the CoA participated in five virtual meetings conducted by the State regarding proposed regulations for assisted living.

At the Federal level, the CoA writes letters on priority issues to appropriate Congressional representatives. Members also support Congressional and Executive Branch outreach conducted by national organizations that represent the older adult population on issues affecting Montgomery County residents.

The CoA usually convenes two significant annual events:

- A **public forum** for older adults in the community to learn about issues that may affect them, and for the CoA to hear from older residents, caregivers, and service providers about their issues of concern. This year, the theme of the public forum, held on May 18, was *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*. A **Legislative Breakfast** that allows the CoA the opportunity to meet with members of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly and inform them about the Commission's work and priorities. It is also a chance for the CoA to learn about the legislators' plans for the upcoming legislative session and for all participants to identify areas for working together to benefit the older adults in the County.

These two events enhance CoA members' knowledge of the issues and concerns of older adults in Montgomery



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County and help to inform the development of CoA advocacy priorities. This year, both the public forum and the Legislative Breakfast were held virtually by Zoom.

### **Key CoA Advocacy Activities in Recent Years**

The CoA believes that Montgomery County continues to make progress toward becoming a Community for a Lifetime as envisioned by the *Senior Agenda*, a document that was developed by the CoA, and endorsed by the County Executive and the County Council in 2012. In keeping with the vision and goals of the *Senior Agenda*, the CoA continues to focus on quality of life for all older adults in the County.

**County Level.** CoA budget advocacy has resulted in additional funding for essential County supports and services for vulnerable older adults, including services that are mandated under Federal and State law, but that require supplemental County funding to meet the need. These programs and services include the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, Adult Protective Services, Public Guardianship, Adult Foster Care, Respite Care, senior centers, and a number of transportation, housing, and nutrition programs.

**State Level.** The CoA has supported several successful State legislative initiatives in recent years including reducing property tax burdens on older homeowners, allowing the Maryland Attorney General to file a civil action for damages on behalf of elder financial abuse victims, and establishing a telephone reassurance program for older adults.

**Advocacy for Innovative Programming.** In recent years, the CoA has successfully advocated for the creation of several innovative County programs and services for older adults along with new positions to support them, including a Transportation and Mobility Manager, a Village Coordinator, a Caregiver Support Coordinator, and a Senior Fellow to manage the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. Other pioneering programs that Montgomery County instituted with CoA support include the Senior Center Plus Program for older adults with cognitive impairments, and a partnership between Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services and the Department of Health and Human Services to provide home health and other assistance to frequent callers to 911. In 2021, the CoA advocated successfully for increased senior housing with three new projects planned for Gaithersburg, Sandy Spring and Damascus.

**Advocacy for an Age-Friendly Montgomery County.** As a result of the Commission on Aging's research and advocacy, in 2015, under the leadership of County Executive Isiah Leggett, Montgomery County enrolled in the World Health Organization/AARP global network of certified Age-Friendly Communities. The County now enjoys the status of a designated Age-Friendly Community, in an initiative known as Age-Friendly Montgomery County. Project leaders created 10 areas of focus, or domains, essential to the Age-Friendly community: Civic and Social Involvement; Communication; Elder Abuse Prevention; Employment; Health and Wellness; Home- and Community-Based Services; Housing; Planning; Open Spaces, Parks, and Community Buildings; Senior Public Safety; and Transportation and Mobility. The County Executive established an Age-Friendly Montgomery County Advisory Group that is comprised of department directors and community leaders who oversee the efforts of the workgroups for the 10 domains. Together, these public and private sector partners plan for and guide work to



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address issues, meet challenges, and build on opportunities for each of the domains. The CoA actively supports and works in collaboration with the Age-Friendly Montgomery County effort. The Commission Chair serves on the advisory group, and CoA members serve on the domain workgroups. In October 2020 AARP recertified the Initiative. Additional information about the Age-Friendly Initiative is available at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/age-friendly.html>.

In 2021, the Chair of the CoA, Barbara Selter, worked with the Age-Friendly Home- and Community-Based Services Workgroup to hold three roundtables to address the issue of sufficient workforce to support the needs of older adults seeking home care services in the County. The roundtables recommended creation of a County-wide Home- and Community-Based Services Workforce Task Force under the auspices of the County Executive.



### **Commission on Aging Briefing Book for Elected Officials and Other Stakeholders**

The CoA developed a “Commission on Aging Briefing Book” to help acquaint the newly-elected County Executive and County Councilmembers with the Commission’s important work. The book provides information on nine key issues facing older adults in Montgomery County including: affordable housing; assisted living affordability; caregiver support; elder abuse, neglect and exploitation; health and social services; quality of care in long-term care facilities; social isolation; and transportation (including driver and pedestrian safety). It also addresses the cross-cutting topics of diversity, communications, and ageism. In 2021, one of the first tasks of the Commission’s newly formed Communications Committee was to update the Briefing Book. The updated Briefing Book is available on the CoA website at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/COA/COAindex.html>.

### **2021 Commission on Aging Advocacy**

The Commission’s 2021 priorities and activities were informed by the goals and recommendations from the County’s *Senior Agenda*, the County Executive’s 2015 Summit on Aging, the Age-Friendly Montgomery County strategic goals, and the recommendations of the 2018, 2019 and 2021 CoA public forums. The CoA also drew upon information gathered from a number of studies that it completed in recent years, from previous stakeholder meetings and public forums, and from input from speakers and agency representatives.

To improve the Commission’s effectiveness as advocates, The Community Action Board provided valuable training to the CoA tailored specifically for the CoA’s advocacy and letter writing efforts. This training was held on September 1, 2021.

### **County**

The Commission recognizes and appreciates the efforts of the County Executive and the County Council to respond to the needs of all older adults in the County, including those who are low-income and otherwise vulnerable, and those who are healthier and more vital. The

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CoA's advocacy includes written and oral testimony at County Council meetings and hearings, meetings with department directors and representatives, and meetings with individual Councilmembers. The County Executive, Councilmembers, and other officials are invited to CoA meetings, and the Commission welcomes any communications to discuss issues affecting older adults in the County.

The CoA's priorities for the FY22 County budget included recommendations for health and social services programs, transportation alternatives, affordable housing expansion and preservation, and new positions and programs that would provide needed support for the County's vulnerable and vital older adults and their families. The Commission's specific budget priorities were provided to the County Executive, the Office of Management and Budget, and the County Council and included:

- *HHS*: Add two social worker positions: one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship Program; and address food insecurity by expanding senior nutrition programs.
- *Transportation*: Provide dependable, available and accessible transportation services through new and innovative programs that expand opportunities for older adults such as FLEX, an innovative on-demand, curb-to-curb and door-to-door application-based scheduled service; and FLASH, an innovative corridor-based express bus service.
- *Housing*: Provide legal assistance for older renters to avoid eviction from their homes, and maintain the Housing Initiative Fund to further expand affordable housing options for older adults.

In April 2021, following release of the County Executive's proposed FY22 budget, Commission members met with County Councilmembers by Zoom to discuss that proposal and to advocate for additional CoA budget priorities. The Council agreed to fund some of the CoA budget priorities including expanding older adult programs, adding one new social worker position in Adult Protective Services, and increasing senior housing with new projects in Gaithersburg, Sandy Spring and Damascus.

To develop its FY23 budget priorities, the CoA held a special meeting in July where, building on previous goals and recommendations, it developed its list of budget priorities for FY23. Guest speakers at the September Commission meeting explained the timeframe of the County budget process and provided other useful insights on how to increase collaboration with the County. These helpful speakers were:

- The Honorable Gabe Albornoz, then-Vice President of the Montgomery County Council;
- Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst; and
- Lindsay Lucas, Budget Analyst.

CoA Chair, Barbara Selter, presented the CoA's budget priorities in testimony before the County Council's Health and Human Services Committee.

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Those priorities included:

- **Home- and Community-based Services:** Fund the expansion of HCBS to more older adults in the County, including residents who are ineligible for Medicaid.
- **Advertising of Programs for Seniors:** Increase funding and assign staffing to aid in efforts to communicate the myriad of valuable services for older adult residents.
- **Access HEARS Program:** Fund this Program that supplies hearing devices and support to lower income residents, which has been proven successful in Allegany and Garrett Counties and the City of Baltimore.
- **Transportation:** Restore cuts to the Escorted Transportation Program administered by Jewish Council for the Aging and expand financial eligibility for that Program.
- **Affordable Housing:** Expand funding for the Housing Initiative Fund.

While the CoA may not be able to advocate for all issues, especially since it is often asked to identify its top two or three budget priorities, the complete list is important because it provides additional guidance for advocacy moving forward. Some budget items for which the CoA has advocated in the past received support even though they did not rise to the highest level of priority in 2021. Some additional issues – e.g., social isolation, and in-home aides – will be studied further by CoA committees.



In 2021, the State and County were in the unique position of determining where to allocate *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA) reinvestment funds. The CoA provided its recommendations to the County as follows:

- Allocate ARPA money to expand home- and community-based services (HCBS). Specifically, funds should be used to increase the number of Medicaid waiver slots, thereby shortening the State’s excessively long waiting list for HCBS.
- Allocate ARPA funds to increase the wages of direct care workers such as home health aides, personal care aides, and certified nurse assistants. Direct care workers are essential to achieving successful outcomes in HCBS. In Maryland, these workers are 90 percent women and more than 60 percent are black.
- Allocate ARPA money to support an Access HEARS pilot in Montgomery County to purchase low-cost hearing devices and provide support services to older adults in the County with hearing loss.
- Allocate ARPA money to help those whose incomes are low, but too high to qualify for Medicaid to remain in their homes. Far too many older adults in Maryland struggle to remain safely in their homes.
- Recommend that the State address the totality of the needs of people qualifying for HCBS. Such a comprehensive approach would include affordable housing, accessible transportation, programs to prevent social isolation, and affordable, accessible medical care that is culturally appropriate.

## **Other County Advocacy Activities**

During 2021, the CoA engaged in several advocacy efforts on behalf of older adults in the County. These efforts included:

### ***Additional Resources for Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardianship Program***

In its special July meeting to discuss budget priorities, the CoA voted to make advocating for additional resources for Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardianship Program one of its highest priorities. The CoA wants to ensure that the County has sufficient staff to investigate and address issues of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults, and to protect and assist those who lack the capacity to care for themselves. In her testimony before the Health and Human Services Committee of the Montgomery County Council, Chair Barbara Selter stated that the CoA supports the hiring of two additional social worker positions in the County's Department of Health and Human Services – one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship Program.

### ***Transportation***

The Commission sent a letter to Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health, expressing concern about the State's proposal to change the delivery of the Non-Emergency Transportation Program from a program that allows Montgomery County to direct its delivery to a State-contracted, broker-type system. The CoA's concern arose from the lack of explanation for this change along with the lack of complaints or problems with the current system that it knows to be successful in the County. The letter requested an explanation for the change, which would take away Montgomery County's flexible, tailored approach and move the management and coordination of the program further away from the residents who depend upon it.

The Commission submitted recommendations to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation on the future use of the Transportation Services Improvement Fund. This fund was created for transportation initiatives that benefit older adults, residents with disabilities, and people with low incomes.

Finally, the CoA supported extending the free Ride-On bus service for older adults.

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### ***Affordable Housing***

The CoA advocated for the Council to create a stable program to provide legal assistance to renters in eviction proceedings, and one that considers the needs of older adults. The Commission advocated also for an increase in the Housing Initiative Fund and for improvements in communicating affordable housing resources. In addition, the CoA advocated for adoption of Universal Design Principles (also known as Design for Life) in housing for older adults.



### ***Food Insecurity***

In its July meeting to discuss budget priorities, the CoA voted to address food insecurity by advocating for the expansion of senior nutrition programs.

### ***Racial Equity and Social Justice***

Although the 2020 annual public forum *What Can Racial Equity Look Like in an Age-Friendly Community?* was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission continued its efforts to educate its members and to advocate for racial equity and equality. The Commission's Task Force on Racial Equity, Dementia Services, and Policing conducted research and issued a final report that included several useful recommendations for the County. The report went to County Executive Marc Elrich, then-County Council President Tom Hucker, Chief Equity Officer Tiffany Ward, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Earl Stoddard, Police Chief Marcus Jones, Assistant Police Chief Darren Francke, and Department of Health and Human Services Director Raymond Crowel. It was also sent to Officer Laurie Reyes of the Montgomery County Police Department's Autism/IDD and Alzheimer's Outreach Program. The report is available to all online at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/1101210COA%20-%20Racial%20Equity%20Task%20Force%20Report%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>.

Other CoA advocacy efforts at the County-level included:

- Advocating for the re-opening of senior centers and the return of senior programming in recreation centers.
- Addressing the serious situation in nursing facilities resulting from termination of the Memorandum of Understanding between the County and State regarding nursing facility surveys and inspections.

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### **State Advocacy**

Several Commission members participated in the Maryland Department on Aging town halls regarding its draft FY2022-2025 State Plan on Aging. In addition, the Commission participated in all five virtual calls conducted by the Office of Health Care Quality on draft proposed regulations for assisted living. The CoA believes that regulations must clearly reflect the needs of the residents.

The Public Policy Committee reviewed dozens of bills filed in the Maryland General Assembly during its 2021 session with a focus on bills of interest to older adults in Montgomery County and within the CoA's general priorities. The Committee researched relevant topics, including aging in place, assisted living, Medicaid waivers, affordable housing, and protection of renters. The Public Policy Committee led the drafting of position letters in support of several bills including:

- HB255, Department of Aging – Grants for Aging-in-Place Programs;
- HB18, the Right to Counsel for Eviction Actions;
- SB204 and HB416 Health Care Facilities – Assisted Living Program;
- HB910, which requires that insurers provide a hearing aid benefit of \$750 per ear; and
- HB093, which requires a task force to study the Maryland Public Guardianship Program.

### ***CoA Response to the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality Decision to Terminate its Memorandum of Understanding for County Surveyors and Inspections of County Nursing Facilities***

In addition to reviewing and supporting proposed legislation, the CoA also responds to State changes to programs that impact Montgomery County's older residents, and, occasionally, the Commission must advocate to both County and State officials. The Maryland Office of Health Care Quality's decision to terminate a decades-long Memorandum of Understanding with Montgomery County that allowed the County to conduct surveys of County nursing facilities is one such situation. Because this change seemed very likely to lead to decreased oversight of Montgomery County nursing facilities and less coordination with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, the CoA quickly became involved in this issue by:

- Conducting a telephone call and writing an email and letter to the Office of Health Care Quality, requesting additional information.
- Sending letters to State legislators requesting a study of the impact of this change to Montgomery County nursing facility residents.
- Sending letters to the County Council and the County Executive expressing its specific concerns.

In the period between July when nursing facility inspections in Montgomery County became the responsibility of the Office of Health Care Quality and November, State staff, after receiving many complaints, only investigated one of those complaints. There were no infection control or annual recertification surveys conducted. Montgomery County officials, fully understanding the seriousness of this situation, prepared a new Memorandum of Understanding that stated that the

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County would cover the entire cost of the surveys, but the State has not agreed to the new arrangement. The Commission actively and strongly advocated for a resolution to this dire situation by:

- Sending a letter to Secretary Schrader urging that the State sign the new Memorandum of Understanding regarding nursing facility surveys in the County.
- Sending letters to State legislators advising them about the seriousness of the situation and asking for their assistance.
- Presenting updated information at its Legislative Breakfast.

Finally, also in 2021, the Commission sent a letter to Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health, about its concerns regarding changes to the Non-Emergency Transportation Program.

### ***Other Announcements***

- Commissioner Ruby Moone was accepted into the 2021 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.
- The Commission nominated late Commissioners Miriam Kelty and Odessa Shannon for the 2022 Maryland Women's Hall of Fame and Commissioner Odessa Shannon was inducted.

### **Federal Advocacy**

The Commission is committed to strengthening home- and community-based services in Montgomery County. Improvement to these services cuts across all levels of government. Therefore, this year, the CoA sent letters to Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) to offer the CoA's support for the draft language for the proposed *Federal Home- and Community-based Services Access Act*.

The CoA also submitted comments to the Commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration regarding proposed rules for the sale of hearing aids over-the-counter.

## **2021 Commission on Aging Activities**

### **Public Forum**

The theme of the CoA's 2021 public forum was *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*. The forum, held on May 18, was a virtual event because the County was still under COVID-19 restrictions. County Executive, Marc Elrich, provided a welcome video for the event, and Liz Necka, from the National Institute on Aging, provided the keynote address. Lynda Flowers of the AARP Public Policy Institute addressed the root causes of social isolation and loneliness and the impact they have on the Medicare system. Lori Marks, the Executive Director of Link Generations, provided a view of the role those intergenerational strategies play in combatting social isolation, both in older adults and young people. Scott Code of LeadingAge described the innovative technologies being used to counter social isolation across the country.



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Short film vignettes provided information about existing programs that are currently combatting social isolation and loneliness today in Montgomery County. The public forum was well-attended, with 220 registrations. More information about the forum is available at the CoA's website at [Montgomery County - Department of Health and Human Services - Commission on Aging - Index \(montgomerycountymd.gov\)](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/Department-of-Health-and-Human-Services-Commission-on-Aging-Index).

In follow-up to the forum, the CoA developed and released a *Fact Sheet on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults* and a *Resources List*. It is available online at [Social Isolation and Loneliness Facts for Older Adults v7 \(2\).pdf \(montgomerycountymd.gov\)](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/Social-Isolation-and-Loneliness-Facts-for-Older-Adults-v7-2.pdf).







**Featured Speakers at Full CoA Meetings in 2021**

The Commission was fortunate to be able to learn from distinguished speakers. Experts presenting at the 2021 full CoA meetings included:

**January:** Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services  
Barry Hudson, Director, Montgomery County Public Information Office

**February:** Enrico Lachica, Clinical Nurse Administrator, Montgomery County Licensure and Regulatory Division Services  
Robert Jensen, Green House Nursing Facilities

**March:** Josiah You, Chief Operating Officer, Access HEARS  
Carrie Nieman, Co-founder, Access HEARS

**April:** Leah Bradley, Executive Director and Co-founder, Empowering the Ages  
Aditi Merchant, Co-founder, Big and Mini

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- May:** Stuart Butler, Brookings Institute and Visiting Fellow, Convergence Center for Policy Resolution
- June:** Jessica Fusillo, Community Outreach and Public Relations Manager, Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services  
Gail Lucas, Permitting Services Manager, Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services  
Jeff Jacobson, Founder & Co-Managing Partner, Universal Communities  
Dean Packard, Professional Engineer, Universal Communities
- July:** No guest speakers; special CoA meeting to determine budget priorities
- August:** Summer break; no meeting
- September:** Gabe Albornoz, then-Montgomery County Council Vice President  
Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County  
Lindsay Lucas, Fiscal and Policy Analyst, Montgomery County
- October:** Elizabeth Barnes, President, Maryland Association of Adult Day Services  
Afshin Abedi, Past President, Maryland Association of Adult Day Services
- November:** Jennifer Long, Aging and Disability Resource Line Manager, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services  
Shawn Brennan, Community Outreach Manager, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services
- December:** CoA Annual Legislative Breakfast

### **CoA Meetings with Department Directors and Other Officials**

In addition to meeting with officials at full CoA meetings, Commission members met individually or in small groups with other experts to inform them of the CoA's work and concerns, and to learn of their organization's priorities and goals. Among those who Commission members met with included:

- Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services
- Eileen Bennett, Program Manager, Montgomery County Ombudsman Program
- Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services
- Frank Demarais, Deputy Director, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Jennifer Long, Aging and Disability Resource Line Manager, Montgomery County Aging and Disability Services
- Dr. Patrice McGhee, Director, Montgomery County Area Agency on Aging
- Stephanie Moore, Resident Services Supervisor, Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County
- Sam Oji, Enhanced Mobility and Senior Services Chief, Montgomery County Department of Transportation

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- Erin Smith, Contract Monitor, Montgomery County State Health Insurance Assistance Program
- State legislators who attended the Legislative Breakfast

The CoA members also met virtually with each of the Montgomery County Councilmembers or their staffs and the County Executive to discuss the Commission's FY21 budget priorities and concerns.

### **Legislative Breakfast**

For many years, the Commission has hosted an annual Legislative Breakfast to meet with members of the County's delegation to the State legislature. County staff also are invited to this event. The Breakfast provides the Commission, delegation members, and County staff the opportunity to share accomplishments of the past year and to identify issues and priorities for the upcoming legislative session.



The CoA held its 2021 Annual Legislative Breakfast on December 16 via Zoom. The

Commission's presentations highlighted the diverse constituency it serves; they focused on the severe problem relating to the lack of surveys in nursing facilities, the difficulties with the Medicaid Home- and Community-based Waiver Program, and the needs of the "Gap" population (individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid, but who do not have enough money to pay for private services.) Legislators who attended included:

### **Maryland State Senators**

- Nancy King
- Benjamin Kramer
- Susan Lee

### **Maryland State Delegates**

- Kumar Barve
- Alfred Carr, Jr.
- Julie Palakovich Carr
- Lorig Charkoudian
- Charlotte Crutchfield
- Bonnie Cullison
- Linda Foley
- David Fraser-Hidalgo
- James Gilchrist
- Anne Kaiser
- Marc Korman

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- David Moon
- Lily Qi
- Pam Queen
- Emily Shetty
- Jared Solomon
- Jheanelle Wilkins

### **CoA Testimony**

Chair Barbara Selter testified before the Montgomery County Council in April regarding the CoA's FY22 and FY23 budget priorities and goals.

### **Standing Committee Activities**

A substantial amount of Commission activity occurs in its standing committees, which provide the opportunity for members and guests to focus in greater depth on specific issues, develop projects, and identify potential priorities. The CoA committees include Aging in Community, Health and Wellness, Public Policy and, new in 2021, Communications. The new Communications Committee was established because the CoA identified the relaying of information on resources and services for older adults as a serious problem in Montgomery County. While the County has many resources for older adults, older adults do not seem to be aware of these resources.



### ***Aging in Community***

In 2021, the Aging in Community (AIC) Committee focused on accessible and affordable housing for older adults, food insecurity, technology to help older adults age in place, and transportation. Specific AIC concerns about inadequate County responses to housing questions were addressed in a meeting between County officials and AIC members and, as a result, the potential of an affordable housing navigator is being considered by the County. Additionally, the AIC studied various housing models such as home-sharing. The AIC also hosted speakers on Vision Zero and Pedestrian Safety Master Programs.

### ***Health and Wellness***

The Health and Wellness Committee's (HWC's) major focus continued to be on the need for more home-based care, particularly for individuals without Medicaid and other resources. The viability of sharing direct care workers across multiple clients in geographic proximity is one potential solution that the HWC studied. The HWC also explored what neighboring jurisdictions are doing and the possibility of collaboration. In addition, the HWC expended great effort on the issue of hearing loss, which affects 70 percent of older adults. Not only did the Committee

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develop a *Hearing Loss Fact Sheet* that was distributed to individuals throughout Montgomery County, but it also identified an excellent program – Access HEARS – and advocated for its expansion into the County.

### ***Public Policy***

The Public Policy Committee takes the lead on much of the Commission’s advocacy on priority issues at the County, State, and Federal levels. During 2021, the Committee reviewed proposed legislation at these three levels of government; researched relevant topics as needed; and drafted testimony, letters of support, and other written documents for the CoA. This Committee also took the lead in convening the annual Legislative Breakfast.

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Specifically, the committee:

- Monitored proposed Federal, State, and local legislation affecting older adults and led the drafting of CoA position letters that were communicated to members of the Montgomery County delegation in Annapolis.
- Drafted letters to the State Office of Health Care Quality, State legislators, members of the Montgomery County Council, and the County Executive expressing concerns about the termination of the Memorandum of Understanding regarding nursing facility inspections.
- Drafted a letter to Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health, expressing the CoA’s concerns regarding changes to the Non-Emergency Transportation Program and a second letter urging that Maryland apply for *American Rescue Plan Act* funds to strengthen access to home- and community-based services.
- Drafted a letter to the County Department of Recreation to support re-opening of all senior centers as quickly as possible.
- Drafted letters to Councilmembers Gabe Alborno, Evan Glass, and Craig Rice to express concern about the State Department of Aging’s request for \$200,00 to support its Community for Life Program in Montgomery County.
- Reviewed and provided input for letters prepared by other CoA committees, such as letters regarding the 1) Montgomery County’s 311 response to affordable housing questions; 2) extension of the Access HEARS pilot into Montgomery County; 3) proposed rules for over-the-counter-hearing aids; and(4) support of the Holy Cross Hospital program, “All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly.”

### ***Communications***

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The new Communications Committee (CC) was established to help the CoA improve both its own and the County’s communications efforts. Its first meeting was held on March 15, 2021 and focused on the CoA’s monthly cable public access television program that is co-produced by the CoA and the County. The program airs several times each month and is also available on the County’s YouTube channel. The Communications Committee determined that the program needed a new name to attract a wider population, and ultimately developed the name, *50+ in Montgomery County*. CoA member, Katie Smith, was selected to host the program.

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Although the CC was not formed until mid-March, its additional accomplishments in 2021 were many including: 1) revising the “New Member Orientation Booklet;” 2) creating a “buddy system” for new CoA members; 3) updating the Commission’s Operations Handbook; and (4) updating the “Commission on Aging Briefing Book” to help acquaint the newly-elected County Executive and County Councilmembers with the Commission’s important work. The updated Orientation Booklet, Operations Handbook, and Briefing Book are available on the CoA website at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/COA/COAindex.html>.

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### **Commission on Aging Plans for 2022**

The Commission on Aging will undertake the following activities in 2022:

- Meet regularly in standing committees and as a full Commission to implement Commission goals and priorities.
- Continue engaging with elected officials and department heads on important older adult issues in the County.
- Identify and examine one or more focus areas of importance to older adults in the County.
- Convene a public forum in May 2022.
- Meet with County Councilmembers on CoA budget priorities in April 2022.
- Advocate on priority issues, including budget issues, at the County, State and Federal levels.
- Identify CoA priorities included in the FY23 budget and establish FY24 County budget priorities.
- Host a Legislative Breakfast in November 2022.
- Participate in the County Executive’s Home- and Community-Based Services Workforce Task Force
- Continue to participate in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Advisory Group and its workgroups and monitor implementation of the Age-Friendly strategic plan as appropriate.
- Learn more about in-home supports and home- and community-based services.
- Attend Department of Health and Human Services’ quarterly Board, Committee, and Commission meetings and prepare quarterly reports.
- Collaborate with other Boards, Committees, Commissions, and other groups as appropriate.
- Other activities as identified.

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