



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC)

Date: March 30, 2020 (FY21 First Quarter Report)

BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)

BCC Representative: Barbara Selter, Chair

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging (CoA) continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of seniors can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic and its resulting health and economic crises. The CoA stands ready to provide services and assistance in any way it can during these particularly difficult times.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. A Commission alumnus is the Senior Fellow that staffs the Initiative, and individual CoA members participate on the various Committees. All have the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a community for a lifetime.

Covid-19

The Commission sent a letter to the County's public health officer, Dr. Travis Gayles, requesting certain changes to the County's vaccination plan. Additionally, 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 conducted research on this important concern and worked on a Public Forum for older adults and their service providers scheduled for next quarter. The theme of the Public Forum is *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*.

CoA Response to State Legislative Proposals

The CoA Public Policy Committee monitors the General Assembly, reviews state legislative proposals and promotes proposed legislation that would be especially helpful to older adults. Letters were written in support of the following proposed legislation:

- HB255, Department of Aging – Grants for Aging-in-Place programs – Funding;
- HB18, the Right to Counsel for Eviction Actions;
- SB204 and HB416 Health Care Facilities – Assisted Living Program
- HB910, requiring that insurers provide a hearing aid benefit of \$750 per ear; and
- HB093, requiring Task Force to Study MD Public Guardianship Program

CoA Response to State Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) Decision to Terminate its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for County Surveyors and Inspections of County Nursing Facilities

At the February Commission meeting, Mr. Enrico Lachica, Licensure and Regulatory Division, DHSS gave a presentation on OHCQ's decision to terminate a decades-long MOU with MC that allowed the County to conduct surveys of MC nursing facilities. Because this change seems very likely to lead to decreased oversight of MC nursing facilities and less coordination with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, the CoA became involved in this issue as follows:

- A telephone call, email and letter were sent to Dr. Nye, OHCQ, requesting additional information.
- A letter was sent to state legislatures requesting a study of the impact of this change to MC nursing facility residents;
- A letter was sent to the MC Council and the County Executive expressing specific concerns.

CoA Response to State Regarding Delivery of Medicaid's Non-Emergency Transportation (NEMT) Program

The Commission was concerned about a State proposal to change the delivery of NEMT from a program that allows MC to direct its delivery to a State-contracted, broker-type system. Our concern arose from the lack of explanation for this change along with the lack of complaints or problems with the current system that we know to be successful in our County. The CoA sent a letter to Dennis R. Schrader, Acting Secretary, MD Department of Health requesting an explanation for this change, which would take away MC's flexible, tailored approach and move the management and coordination of the program further away from the residents who depend upon it.

Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS), Aging in the Community, Health and Wellness, and Transportation

Unfortunately, MD is behind many other states in the percentage of Medicaid dollars allotted to HCBS. Also, 65% of renters who are 65+ in the County are rent-burdened (defined as paying more than 30% of income on housing). Thus, HCBS and Aging at home continue to be major areas of work for the Commission.

- The Health and Wellness Committee (HWC) worked on the need for more home-based care particularly for individuals without Medicaid and other resources. This Committee met with Jennifer Long, DHHS, on the County's 240-777-3000 number, and Erin Smith, SHIP Contract Monitor on the SHIP program. Additionally, the HWC worked on the effects of hearing loss on the older adult community and had speakers from the ACCESS HEARS program that provides affordable hearing aids to low-income older adults in Allegheny County and Baltimore City.

- The Aging in Community Committee (AIC) focused on affordable rental housing at its January meeting. Frank Demarais, Deputy Director of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs; and Stephanie Moore, Resident Services Supervisor of the Housing Opportunities Commission, addressed the AIC. Also this quarter, Sam Oji, MC Department of Transportation addressed the AIC on transportation issues for older adults. Finally, Pazit Aviv, Villages Coordinator, MC Aging and Disability Service, DHHS updated the Committee on the status of Villages in the County. (Ms. Aviv also provided a primer on Villages to the whole Commission at its January meeting.)
- The Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors (SILOS) Task Force, formed last year from the HWC and the AIC Committee remained very active. SILOS wishes to bring diversity to its work, to be all-inclusive, and to find those individuals who are slipping through the cracks. It is planning the Commission’s April Public Forum, *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*.
- The Commission’s Task Force on Dementia, Policing, and Racial Equity, also formed last year, continues to work on its recommendations and final report.

Additional Experts at CoA Meetings

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

- At the January meeting, Barry Hudson, Director, MC Public Information Office (PIO) presented on how MC communicates with older adults and how the PIO and the CoA can work together to improve communications.
- At the February meeting, Robert Jensen, Green House Nursing Facilities, presented on reforming nursing home care in the post-COVID era.
- At the March meeting, Josiah Yiu, and Carrie Nieman, Access HEARS presented on their Baltimore program and the possibility of expanding it to MC.

Communications

The CoA is ramping up its communications efforts. It established a new Communications Committee that held its first meeting on March 15. This meeting focused on *Seniors Today*, as well as on the Committee’s future focus, which will include orientation, advocacy training and other issues.

A new host, Katie Smith, was selected for *Seniors Today*.

The Communications Committee also has been working on revising the current orientation program for new Commission members, including development of a New Member Orientation Booklet and a “buddy” system to help new Commissioners quickly become more effective in their new role.

Collaboration with Other Boards, Commissions, and Committees

CoA collaborates with other Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as appropriate. CoA also welcomes representatives of other Boards, Commissions and Committees at its standing Committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their activities at CoA's monthly meetings.