Commission on Children and Youth
Annual Report
2023-2024

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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 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The Youth Advisory Committee meets from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month (September to June). The Commission meetings are open to the public. Currently, the Commission is hosting all meetings virtually. The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission typically holds an annual strategic planning retreat in June and selects priority issues for the upcoming Commission year. Subcommittees are formed around the selectedpriorities

Letter from the Chair

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
COMMISSION ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

September 1, 2024

The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Evan Glass, 2023 Council President
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Karla Silvestre, President
Montgomery County Board of Education

Dr. James Bridgers, Director
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Residents of Montgomery County, MD

Dear Mr. Elrich, Mr. Glass, Ms. Silvestre, Dr. Bridgers, and Residents of Montgomery County,

The 2023-2024 Commission year has been eventful, as we had the leadership of active Youth Commissioners and a second year of leadership by our Youth Vice Chair, Ms. Jackie Wang. At our last meeting in June of 2023, the Commission chose Career Readiness and LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports as the primary focus for the upcoming year in an effort to highlight specific areas that were highlighted by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and a population of youth in need of specific and targeted support.

For this year, the Commissioners focused on Youth Civic Engagement, Career Readiness and LGBTQ+ Awareness. We held another successful Annual Youth Summit on March 12th, 2024. Over 80 students from middle and high schools throughout the County registered to participate in this year's event. Although apprehensive at first, students gradually became attentively engaged on the Commission's priorities. The breakout sessions provided more informal and comfortable environments and the feedback received provided "eye-opening" perspectives to emphasize and act upon future efforts by the Commission and Council members. The Commission welcomed observers from the Montgomery County Council and Montgomery County Public Schools.

Included in this year's Commission on Children and Youth report are findings and recommendations related to the three focus areas. The Commission also considered and included expert knowledge and cultivated collaborative partnerships by holding speaking events (during our monthly meetings) with representatives for the Department of Juvenile Justice (Attorney Kevin Redden), the Montgomery County Council (2024 Council President Andrew Friedson and 2023 Council President Evan Glass) and Worksource Montgomery (Executive Director Anthony Featherstone), in order to establish engagement across other agency and community partners.

In closing, as my term as Commission Chair ends, it has been a pleasure to serve in this capacity for the past two years and I would like to introduce Ms. Shané Tate as the incoming Chair. Shané has served with the Commission for 3 years and, with her leadership, I am looking forward to seeing the direction and impact that the Commission will continue to make. I also send well-wishes to Jackie Wang, Youth Commissioner, as she moves on to embark on her next chapter to college. I thank her for her service and leadership and wish her the best.
I continue to be grateful for the support of the students, parents, Board of Education, County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the overall community of Montgomery County, Maryland. Together, we can excel in building stronger communities and partnerships, in order to empower our youth to engage, lead and advocate for themselves and the community!

Sincerely,

LaTanya R. Johnson
CCY, Chair 2023-2024

Commision Membership

The Commission on Children and Youth is comprised of 27 members, all who are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. Twenty-two of the members are divided equally to represent the following categories: 1) individuals with recent experience in agencies providing services to children and youth 2) youth and young adults from Montgomery County, and 3) parents of children and youth who live in Montgomery County. The remaining five members are ex-officio representatives from the following departments: 1) a representative from the public school system 2) a representative from an independent school in Montgomery County 3) a representative from the Department of Recreation and 4) two representatives from Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. Each commissioner serves a three-year term with the option of serving two full terms. Youth commissioners serve a one-year term with the option of serving two full terms.

Parent Representatives
• Jane Chappell
•Michael Jimenez
• LaTanya Johnson, Commission Chair
• Constance Mordecai
• Johnnie Peace
• Gregory Pollock
• Sara Rosen
• Gregory Tucker
• Corinne Yourman

Youth Representatives
• Ellyce Butuyan
• Aliza George
• Jackie Wang, Commission Vice Chair
• Angela Wu

Private Agency Representatives
• Stephanie Clark, Leaders Institute
• Jose Diaz, CCI Health Services
• Kimberly McLurkin-Harris, MCPS Recovery and Academic Program
• Chanel Speaks, EveryMind
• Shané Tate, Six Tool Solutions

Ex Officio Members
• Kirsten Andersen, Linkages to Learning, Dept. Health and Human Services
• Walter Pegues, Department of Recreation and Parks
• Jeanett Peralta, School Health Services, Dept. of Health and Human Services
• Julia Guillen Williams, Montgomery County Public Schools
• Vacant, Representative, Private/Independent School

Staff to the Commission
Dr. Pearline Tyson, Staff to the Commission Montgomery County
Department of Health and Human Services

Youth Commission Priority: Civic Engagement

 The Commission on Children and Youth's Youth Commissioners' subcommittee voted to focus on youth civic engagement with a particular focus on examining the current county opportunities and resources for youth civic engagement and the disparities in access to civic engagement opportunities and education that may exist for our county's child and youth residents. Youth civic engagement is critical for our democracy, our communities, our youth, and for equity (CIRCLE). According to Youth.gov, "Youth civic engagement is defined as working to make a difference in the civic life of one's community. It also involves developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference." It is the Youth subcommittee's belief that youth are the future of our nation and of our county, therefore, it is the county's duty to empower and uplift the voices of the youth to the best of their abilities. The subcommittee collected the perspectives of Montgomery County students through its annual youth convening and combined data received with research on national trends, approaches and models of youth civic engagement.

 By involving youth in civic matters, the county can reach more diverse perspectives and viewpoints on key issues. Youth input is also integral to our local communities, shaping the culture and providing firsthand accounts of many local problems especially within MCPS. Civic engagement helps young people build skills that are valued in the workplace, creating a source of economic mobility, and by bridging the gap with the youth, the county can ensure that no voice goes unheard. Nationwide, there are evident patterns of increased youth civic engagement. In 2022, 23% of young people voted in the most recent election; the second-highest youth turnout rate for a midterm in the past 30 years (CIRCLE).

 Currently, there is an abundance of opportunities regarding civic engagement, such as school student government associations (SGAs), the Montgomery County Public Schools Student Member of the Board (SMOB), his/her advisory council, and more related to the position. Furthermore, special programs have been developed throughout the years to promote civic engagement. For instance, the Montgomery County Council created the Council Member for a Day Challenge for students in the county to enact a council member's duties; the winner of the challenge is chosen through their public policy video representation project. Furthermore, the council and government have further opportunities, such as this commission—the Commission on Children and Youth—and its associated "Youth Having a Voice" Roundtable. Additional opportunities for youth civic engagement and leadership development in the county also include Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles' S.M.A.R.T. Youth Advisory Council. Various county agencies convene youth leaders as Youth Action Boards and similarly youth-led governing bodies including the Montgomery County Department of Recreation and the Interagency Commission on Homelessness and the county's MoCoReconnect.

Youth Commission Priority: Civic Engagement

   However, despite these opportunities, the subcommittee has recognized a need for increased accessibility. During the Commission's "Youth Having A Voice" Roundtable event, youth at both middle and high school levels echoed that many of them were left unaware of county opportunities for civic engagement as well as lacking any education on how our local government functions and/or specifics on the voting registration process. It is the subcommittee's goal to bridge this gap in information to ensure that all youth have equitable access to resources and opportunities for civic engagement through the following recommendations:

1. The subcommittee recommends a redefining of the recognition of youth involved in civic engagement. In order to increase youth participation in civic engagement opportunities, it is important to offer incentives and motivation. The county can achieve this by reframing civic engagement as something that is readily available for everyone and providing awards to celebrate outstanding civic contributions by youth. Awards and recognition can provide a goal for youth to work towards as well as earn.

2. The subcommittee recommends the establishment of a new website or webpage under Montgomery County focused on promoting youth opportunities for civic engagement. As seen from feedback during the Youth Voice Roundtable, students are oftentimes unaware of the breadth of opportunities available for them to become civically involved at a county or local level. Therefore, there is a need to consolidate these youth civic engagement opportunities under one online location to increase readability and accessibility for students across the county. Currently, the Montgomery County SSL website is the location for most announcements for and/or recruitment of students to become involved in service-based opportunities. However, it is best to distinguish service opportunities from civic opportunities by creating a separate webpage/website which could potentially utilize the format of the current SSL website. This website/webpage must also include a section on voting registration and information for youth in Montgomery County in order to spread awareness and disseminate the important steps towards voting for local and national elections. During local elections, this page can include short bios of each candidate to inform students on campaign promises.

3. The subcommittee recommends increased promotion of youth civic engagement opportunities through County officials. This can be achieved either through each officials' respective webpage or through social media promotion as well as the implementation of more programs under each official reaching out to youth.

4. The subcommittee recommends increased school outreach regarding education about the voting process through open lines of communication with school administrators to ensure each student is aware of their voting rights and the process it entails.

Youth Commission Priority: Civic Engagement

 Ultimately, it is crucial for the county to invest in youth civic engagement because it fosters informed and active citizens, strengthens community bonds, and ensures a diverse representation of voices in democratic processes, leading to a more equitable and thriving society. Youth are already showcasing their ability to play key roles in the democratic process, as seen through their active participation in our county-wide Youth Voice Roundtable event.

Youth Civic Engagement Opportunities through the Commission on Children and Youth

 During the Commission's annual "Youth Having A Voice" Roundtable event, we received feedback from youth on our topics for this year: career readiness, LGBTQIA+ resources, and civic engagement. The youth were able to effectively communicate their perspectives on each topic related to the Commission's priorities for this year: career readiness. supports for LGBTQIA+ youth, and civic engagement.

 Regarding career readiness resources, students shared how, in general, most schools contain a curriculum focused on core academic subjects rather than skills that will prepare students for a job or a career. Students who have experienced financial literacy classes find that the curriculum focuses more on how to save money (such as through traditional methods i.e. 401K) rather than how to make money. They also noted how programs that help organize internships are more common within private institutions rather than within MCPS schools. The most workplace exposure that most students receive is during events where adults come in to talk about their current jobs during career fair-like events.

 Reflecting on the support provided to LGBTQIA+ youth and their particular needs, students described that if gender neutral/single bathrooms are actually available in their respective schools, they were either reserved for staff or kept locked. They also noted how LGBTQIA+ inclusion is generally not included in their classes to avoid controversy. In terms of creating change, students have noticed that the support is present for the LGBTQIA+ community through clubs and affinity groups, but widely accessible education about the LGBTQIA+ community is lacking.
These viewpoints, voices, and experiences are all evidence of the power of the youth perspective. It is time, as a county, that we acknowledge this power and create a system in which youth civic engagement opportunities are accessible and encouraged.

[1] Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), "Why Is Youth Civic Engagement Important?" Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University, accessed June 12, 2024, https://circle.tufts.edu/understanding-youth-civic-engagement/why-it-important.

[2] Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. "Civic Engagement." Youth.gov, Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering. Accessed 7 August 2024.

[3] Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), "Broadening Youth Voting," Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University, accessed June 12, 2024, https://circle.tufts.edu/our-research/broadening-youth-voting.

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

In recent years, our community has increasingly recognized the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth. Despite notable progress, mental health issues among these young people persist, underscoring the need for targeted support. This report presents key recommendations to enhance support systems for LGBTQIA+ youth and their families in Montgomery County.

Before presenting our recommendations, the subcommittee commends Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for their decision to include LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials in the curriculum. This initiative ensures that all students and their families feel represented and respected in educational settings. It positively impacts not only LGBTQIA+ students seeking acceptance, but also children from same-sex families who now see their lives reflected alongside others.

We also applaud the County's recent investment in MoCo Pride, which demonstrates a clear and intentional commitment to the health, safety, and wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community. Such decisions set a precedent for inclusive policies that all entities in the County can emulate to further support LGBTQIA+ residents, particularly children and youth.

To add to our County's intentional focus on being inclusive, our recommendations aim to transform current policies and create impactful ecosystems that support all youth, with a specific focus on LGBTQIA+ youth. In our report, you will find strategies to:

- Create Safe Spaces: Defined by the Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Education Network (GLSEN, Inc.), the leading national non-profit supporting LGBTQIA+ youth in K-12 schools, as a space, place or group that is "...a supportive and affirming environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students." (GLSEN)
- Change School Cultures: Implement measures through specialized training, recruitment, hiring and promotion policies, and new support staff roles with an eye on equitable wellbeing and achievement outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth.
- Improve Physical and Mental Health Supports: Enhance mental and physical wellness supports for LGBTQIA+ youth within schools and across all youth-serving systems in the County.
- Promote Unified Support: Foster a coordinated approach to the care, learning, and development of LGBTQIA+ children and youth and their families that leverages all child and youth-serving agencies and systems as a supporting ecosystem.

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

These recommendations are designed to move our child and youth-serving systems towards true systemic transformation, ensuring that all youth, especially LGBTQIA+ youth, receive the support they need to thrive.

The "Why" Behind our Recommendations

The subcommittee has chosen to highlight the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth because we feel that it is crucial to prioritize the survival of LGBTQIA+ youth by ensuring their safety, access to resources, and protection from discrimination and harassment. However, survival alone is not enough; we also aim for LGBTQIA+ youth to thrive as cherished residents, which includes promoting their mental health, supporting their identities, providing affirming environments, and fostering opportunities for personal growth and wellbeing. Creating spaces that validate their experiences, offering mental health support tailored to their needs, and advocating for inclusive policies are essential steps toward ensuring both their surviving and thriving as individuals.

School connectedness, which refers to feeling close to people at school, has been identified as a key marker for student success. It has a lasting positive impact on adolescents well into adulthood. However, youth from the LGBTQIA+ community, among other groups, often feel less connected at school. The reasons for this are numerous but the key is that we must enact changes that result in helping our LGBTQIA+ youth feel more connected to their schools.(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 508).

A study conducted by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law found that LGBTQIA+ individuals who lived in communities with higher levels of acceptance and support reported lower rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse compared to those in less accepting environments (Hatzenbuehler, 896). This suggests that when LGBTQIA+ individuals feel acknowledged and supported within their communities, they experience better mental health outcomes.

Furthermore, studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ youth who perceive higher levels of support from their families, peers, and communities have lower rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Ryan et al. 346). Feeling acknowledged and accepted by their surroundings fosters a sense of belonging and reduces the internalized stigma and shame often experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals. Additionally, research published in the Journal of Adolescent Health indicates that LGBTQIA+ youth who have access to supportive school environments, including inclusive policies, supportive staff, and LGBTQIA+-inclusive curriculum, experience lower rates of mental health issues such as depression and suicidal behavior (Toomey et al., 1580). Acknowledging the LGBTQIA+ population within educational settings not only validates the identities of LGBTQIA+ youth but also creates safer and more affirming environments, which can have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing.

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

To date, there is a vast amount of research showing an ongoing need to support of LGBTQIA+ youth and that such support leads to better health outcomes, better mental health and wellbeing, and increased likelihood of academic success. The question is, how do we support these youth in a community like Montgomery County, which grapples with identity intersectionality of disparate communities with our demonstrated desire to be welcoming and supportive towards our LGBTQIA+ community? We believe we have identified such recommendations as stated below:

1. **Creating Safe Spaces:**

Efforts to create safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ students in MCPS should involve:

- Expanding the MCPS current equity core value which emphasizes that "outcomes should not be predictable by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status" to read "race, ethnicity, sex (including sexual orientation or gender identity), or socioeconomic status." (Board of Education)
- Training Teachers and Staff as Allies: Teachers, staff, and coaches should be encouraged to turn individual classrooms, gyms, and offices into safe spaces, properly marked with posters, placards, and stickers. This requires training in supportive allyship and creating an inclusive environment.
- Establishing safe spaces with adult mentors and allies available at all times and clearly marked with signage in multiple languages. These spaces should be identified in every MCPS school, at all levels, with adult mentors and allies, including at least one mental health professional trained to support LGBTQIA+ students. Documentation of GSA/LGBTQIA+ allies should be provided at the start of each school year, and staff expansion at the elementary level is necessary. (Montgomery County Public Schools, Guidelines for Student Gender Identity)
- Ensuring that every school has open, clean, and operational gender-neutral bathrooms, including locker rooms, or provides a designated private restroom. (Maryland State Department of Education)
- Allocating funds for LGBTQIA+ Youth spaces, modeled after MoCo Reconnect (MoCo Reconnect.org). Additional safe spaces should be designated at each Montgomery County Public Library branch and Recreation Center.
- Supporting and encouraging LGBTQIA+ student initiatives in creating their own safe spaces, clubs, alliances, events, and opportunities.
- Ensuring inclusive athletic environments by annually confirming adherence to the R.A.I.S.E. core values to ensure inclusive climates for coaches, student-athletes, and fans in all environments, including locker rooms, bleachers, buses, and team activities. (Montgomery County Public Schools, MCPS Athletics Gender Identity).

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

2. Changing School Culture:

Efforts to foster a more LGBTQIA+ supportive school culture should include:

- Creating a culture where teachers or senior staff members feel safe and comfortable being openly LGBTQIA+ through consistent implementation of written policies at every school and implementation of an accountability reporting mechanism. (Montgomery County Public Schools, Guidelines for Student Gender Identity) (Montgomery County Public Schools, "Intake Form: Supporting Student Gender Identity") Schools should document and celebrate effective implementation of these policies.
- Implementing annual, mandatory, comprehensive LGBTQIA+ training, in alignment with national standards, for all MCPS staff to move beyond superficial level materials towards genuine understanding of the LGBTQIA+ student experience and the benefits of allyship for LGBTQIA+ students.
- Enforcing hiring policies that prioritize the hiring of staff at all levels who align with MCPS's equity and social justice principles as part of MCPS's anti-bias practices. This should include the inclusion of interview questions related to MCPS's equity and anti-bias values, standards, and practices such as their commitment to "...diversity, equity, inclusion, empathy, and students' social-emotional needs..." or asking an applicant "...to explain how they honor the diversity of their students in their instruction and curriculum. (Will)
- Establishing LGBTQIA+ "navigators" in schools to connect LGBTQIA+ students with relevant internal and external resources. Providing specialized training on the needs specific to LGBTQIA+ students and available resources. These navigators can also act as consultants to other staff members and sponsors for GSA clubs. (Equity Initiatives Unit - Montgomery County Public Schools)
- Providing both internal and external support for LGBTQIA+ school staff, such as an affinity group and education about available resources at New Educator Orientation.

3. Improving Physical and Mental Health Support:

Enhancing mental wellness support for LGBTQIA+ youth should extend beyond traditional therapy and wellness centers. According to Heinze in a publication of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "LGBTQIA+ individuals are twice as likely to experience mental health issues in their lives due to stress and threat of discrimination with suicide being the leading cause of death for LGBTQIA + people ages 10-24. Youth in this group are more than five times more likely to die by suicide than their heterosexual peers." The same publication reports that forty eight percent of LGBTQ youth engage in self harm each year, yet this group faces more barriers accessing care.

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

Our subcommittee recommends:

- Focusing on Middle Schools to increase the LGBTQIA+ inclusive efforts and mental wellness supports, such as ensuring that there are Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) at each Middle School and Middle School Counselors receive training on supporting LGBTQIA+ students.
- More widely publicizing the availability of processes for name and gender changes within the school system to support transgender and non-binary students. (Montgomery County Public Schools, Guidelines for Student Gender Identity) (Montgomery County Public Schools, "Intake Form: Supporting Student Gender Identity")
- Local, State and Federal law enforcement and LGBTQ organizations and leaders can work together to share approaches to combat and respond to bias incidents and hate crime. This can serve as a way of strengthening historically fragile relationships. (U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service)
- Addressing barriers to reporting LGBTQIA+ harassment to law enforcement, echoing recommendations from the Anti-Hate Task Force. (Johnson et al.)
- Ensuring accessibility to HIV testing and treatment as well as affirming healthcare for youth, particularly for those who may not feel comfortable involving their families. (Johnson et al., 33)

4. Promoting Unified Support Across Agencies:

Our subcommittee advocates for a unified approach to supporting LGBTQIA+ youth across all County funded youth-serving agencies. This entails aligning goals, missions, and policies to ensure consistent support for LGBTQIA+ youth. Collaboration between agencies/departments such as Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH), Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health (CABH), Office of Community Action (OCA), Positive Youth Development (PYD), Department of Recreation, and/or Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) is essential to maximize impact. Currently there is not a unified mission, policies, or best practices within the various County departments on how best to work with and support the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth. We recommend at least quarterly meetings to promote interagency collaboration in working with LGBTQIA+ youth and review of policies and procedures. In addition, the County should adopt a set of evaluation tools to ensure that policies and procedures are supportive of LGBTQIA+ youth, as well as increase its collaboration with MoCo Pride.

Commission Priority: LGBTQIA+ Youth Supports

Lastly, the subcommittee would like to acknowledge a specific issue of the disproportionate representation of LGBTQIA+ youth among the homeless population. (Morton et al.) (The Trevor Project). We recognize that this issue deserves more detailed review and consideration than we were able to provide in this report. However, we would like to underscore the necessity for establishing a youth shelter to provide a safe haven for all vulnerable youth. Councilmember Evan Glass spoke about this at length during his interview with the CCY late last year. Specifically, we recommend the County address the risk of homelessness for LGBTQIA+ youth in both an immediate and preventative manner which may include but not be limited to:

- Leverage MoCoReconnect, which is a step in the right direction in addressing the intersectional needs and various demographic groups of homeless youth.
- Ensure that all youth, but especially LGBTQIA+ youth, have access to youth and young adult-serving shelters and temporary housing in emergency settings.
- Ensuring that systems and agencies provide support to LGBTQIA+ youth, such as MCPS and DHHS, and publish regular reports identifying the emerging needs being addressed to allow for increased and sustained investments.

In conclusion, the subcommittee commends Montgomery County's efforts to be an inclusive space, but more needs to be done to help ensure our youngest LGBTQIA+ residents are given the necessary support to feel supported, achieve happiness, and ultimately, be successful into adulthood. Montgomery County is a truly special place in our country and has the ability to be a leader in LGBTQIA+ inclusion; we believe that adopting our recommendations will materially move us towards that status. By addressing key areas such as school culture, mental health support, and safe spaces, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all young people. Collaboration between agencies, policy changes, and resource allocation are essential to achieving this goal. Together, we can ensure that every LGBTQIA+ youth feels valued, respected, and supported in Montgomery County.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

2023- 2024 Speakers to Subcommittee

- Attorney Kevin Redden (Dec) - Chair, Montgomery County Commission on Juvenile Justice
- Anthony Featherstone (Jan) – Executive Director, Worksource Montgomery (WSM) and James LeBlanc - Directory of Community Impact, Worksource Montgomery (WSM)
- Fred Williams (Apr) - Director for Workforce Development

Priority Topic: Career Readiness

The Career Readiness subcommittee focused on ways to improve Career Readiness within the Montgomery County communities, as well as in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system.

The objective was to examine, identify and report available programs, assets and resources, to prepare children and youth for a successful and meaningful independent adult life. The target group of research is the youth in general (ages 16-23), while also focusing on children and young adults transitioning back into society after incarceration. Additionally, the Committee has taken into account the expected and anticipated impacts of increasing technology and emerging business and industry needs in the future.

The Commission recognizes the importance of the children and youth of Montgomery County (as well as in the State of Maryland) obtaining career education and career readiness in order to thrive and become successful in society. It is necessary for the County to focus, not only in school settings, but on external access of career education to the youth in order to make informative, and potentially permanent, life decisions.

The Commission has identified and focused on a number of immediate and future recommendations which are essential with meeting the necessary college readiness needs and goals of Montgomery County, as well as the State of Maryland.

Immediate Recommendations:

- Site Visit with Town Hall - Thomas Edison High School of Technology.
- Make Career Readiness information more easily and readily accessible - clearly readable and available.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

Future Recommendations:
- Implement One-Stop-Shops - Adequately publicize and utilize partnerships and State-funded apprenticeships and entrepreneurships.
- Identify ongoing challenges, taking into account experiences of comparable neighboring communities comparisons and execute appropriate resolutions.
- Increase priority status of College and Career Readiness and Education within MCPS and appropriate school curricula.
- Identify ongoing challenges and resolutions in neighboring counties

1. **Prioritize College and Career Readiness and Education within MCPS as imperative and incorporate within the school curricula.**

There is ample evidence that schools which foster positive and constructive influences of effective career development programs (involving collaboration between teachers and school counselors), while utilizing an abundance of technologically-supported tools, as well as programs and practices which assist in the planning and managing of individuals' careers to develop student career awareness and encompass the entire school experience. (Sampson, et. al, 2011) In order to achieve this, it is necessary that MCPS, as well the County itself, make career education a priority and mandatory, as early as secondary school, to provide all students the necessary tools for being successful and impactful in society.

After the Commission hosted a Youth Roundtable for Montgomery County middle and high school students this past April, it was made apparent that, presently, there is little to no emphasis on the importance of career readiness, nor is it a priority. According to the Maryland College and Career Readiness Empirical Study published in 2023, analysis indicated that although the content in Maryland high schools aligns with the required English, Math and Science criteria for students to be prepared for entry into college level courses, many students are still not prepared to enter college or the workforce, based upon the lack of logistical and mental preparation. More guidance and support is needed by Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and schools to prioritize and assist in career readiness and career path planning. It is our belief that career development and readiness should be included as a part of school curriculum, as it will be inherent in a student's mind that a career is just as important as sufficient grades, wherein good grades lead to a successful career.

With reciprocal engagement and career development provided to in-school youth, student attrition (due to the lack of work and life relevance) is ultimately reformed, as well as retained. Students with a career plan are more likely to stay and finish school, having and maintaining a sense of belonging. The Empirical Study cited above also shows that not only do career development programs assist in determining one's career path, but they also enhance students' overall academic achievement, as well as long-term individual growth and empowerment.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

People who experience academic success are more likely to receive higher earnings and other lifelong indicators of success. Additionally, there is a higher probability that established career development results in more high school graduations, college enrollments, and the support of transition to college and alternative career paths. The transition from school to work can be challenging, and with adequate career education and preparation, the transition will be more straightforward and will enhance job satisfaction. These factors are all interconnected and are essential in determining economic value within society, which ultimately determine the quality of individuals' lives, whether it be through life fulfillment or disposable income. As a result, individuals are willing and able to make social and economic contributions to their communities and societies. (Sampson, et. al, 2011)

Furthermore, studies have shown that with the implementation of career education/career readiness, key "soft skills" are also acquired when emphasizing student engagement, career and overall life success. The soft skills consist of: communication, higher order thinking, self-awareness, self-management and social skills, which ultimately result in responsible decision-making and long withstanding relationships. If these skills are taught in school, they will certainly assist with students' preparedness for college and careers. (Lippman et al., 2015 & Detgen, et. al, 2021).

The high school student experience with college and career readiness initiatives in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) does not seem to be as uniformly integrated into the curriculum as it is with the middle school student experience. Stephanie Clark, with the Leaders Institute and CoCY agency representative, supervises several high school leadership lunch clubs representing Down County, Mid County and Up County and reports that as a leadership initiative, students in each region have coincidentally formed work teams to bridge gaps in the inequitable access to college and career readiness opportunities amongst their peers. Stephanie's research indicates that, from the student perspective, there does not seem to be a uniformed approach to accessing college and career preparedness opportunities. Some students access career advancement opportunities based on referrals as a result of being in a designated career path. Others were sought out by their school advisor. Others had no idea how to access early career readiness opportunities.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

2. Provide expansive exposure and readily accessible information to students for Career Readiness and Education within MCPS and extended communities
a. **Information should be explicit and readily accessible**

Presently, MCPS has an expansive amount of College and Career Readiness (CCR) information on its website and corresponding pages. However, much of the wording being used to describe programs and resources sounds similar and interchangeable. During this Commission's "Youth Having a Voice" Roundtable, high school attendees expressed uncertainty about how to access CCR information and opportunities. They may be overwhelmed trying to sort out different references in order to understand what is relevant to his or her individual needs and circumstances. For example, an MCPS site search brings up the following related, similar sounding resources: *Pathway to College, Career and Community Readiness; Work-based Learning; College and Career Center; Career and Post-Secondary Partnerships; MoCo Career Advising Center (MOCOCAP); and College/Career Research and Development (CCRD)*. It takes some effort to sort through the information and determine which information relates to student programs and/or descriptions of different support initiatives.

Dr. Genevieve Floyd, Supervisor for MCPS Career and Postsecondary Partnerships, reports the school system attempts to vary the communication methods for promoting CCR programs at the school level as well as at the county level. She stated that every effort is made to disseminate information in multiple languages via website posts, emails, messages through ParentVue, and broadcasts through TV and video presentations. In addition, staff from high schools meet with students in middle schools as a part of their outreach strategy. The messaging includes the Special Education and English Language Learner communities. Dr. Floyd stresses that communication efforts continue to "keep evolving" and that the county has begun new attempts through social media sites like FaceBook.

b. **Identify and prevent inequitable access to resources and opportunities**
Career Readiness Information should be readily and easily publicized to all youth of Montgomery (i.e. middle school, young adult, out-of school and juvenile offenders). Further research of the MCPS website confirms the inequitable access to career readiness resources. There is a plethora of great information, but it is unclear how students gain access to those resources. Additionally, not every high school has a "Career Readiness Program". MCPS should ensure that these programs exist across all high schools within Montgomery County.

The issue of inequitable access to career readiness and preparedness resources is still consistent with the Commission on Children and Youth's 2021/2022 findings on the scarcity of opportunities and pathways to youth seeking employment in Montgomery County. Consistent themes emerged from both the discussions in 2022 and now again in 2024. Overall, students expressed a lack of knowledge concerning available opportunities. The findings still apply, are concerning, and need to be addressed.

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We must also ensure that the implementation and expansion of educational and skills programs is extended to all youth, including within juvenile detention centers or probation services and those transitioning back into society from juvenile detention centers. The Juvenile Services Education Program (JSEP) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) provide programs which implement and administer educational programs. These programs and services can assist young offenders by providing pathways to earn high school diplomas or GEDs. Workshops in resume writing, job interviewing, financial literacy, and conflict resolution can further enhance their employability, as well as offering juvenile offenders practical experience and professional connections. Providing support services to juvenile offenders upon their release is crucial. These services include job placement assistance, access to housing, transportation, healthcare, and mental health services. Ensuring continuity of care during the transition from incarceration to community life is essential for successful reintegration, reducing recidivism, and fostering long-term success. By adopting these strategies and investing in the future of juvenile offenders, Montgomery County can make significant progress in breaking the cycle of incarceration and promoting positive youth development.

c. Increase oversight and enforcement of MCPS' (and MCPS-partnered) current and future initiatives

In FY '24, MCPS had an overall operating _budget_ of $3.17 billion. The budget covers 211   schools and approximately 163,000 students. CCR initiatives were listed under Curriculum and Instruction Programs. Curriculum and Instruction Programs were allocated $85,385,365, but it is unknown how much of that was set aside specifically for CCR initiatives.

According to the MCPS website, there are currently 51 programs of study in 12 career clusters. High School programs in the county include Dual Enrollment, a partnership with MCPS and Montgomery College that allows students to complete college level coursework and earn a two-year Associate's degree. Additionally, students are able to take AP and IB classes to earn college credit. MCPS also has a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that provides students an opportunity to obtain industry certifications and experience real-world opportunities.

Jazmine Delos Reyes, the College and Career Information Coordinator at Montgomery Blair High School, in MCPS, describes several new initiatives for students this year: free college field trips for high schoolers to visit universities; MOCOCAP, a career advising component to assist students with navigating internships and apprenticeships through a partnership with WorkSource Montgomery; and implementation of the RIASEC assessment to help students determine their aptitude toward certain careers and work environments. In order to fulfill MCPS's Career Readiness mission to give students a competitive advantage for lifelong career success, MCPS has begun a middle school initiatives to include but not limited to:
- familiarizing students with the same RIASEC career advising tool used on the high school level;
- convening a 6th grade in-demand industry experience;
- introducing middle school students to available resources at Montgomery College; and
- Access to educators from various disciplines who meet regularly to integrate career advising in their departments.

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The MCPS Student Career Readiness Coordinator for Middle School engagement, college and career readiness is approached from a couple of perspectives: career advising coaches and "champion teams."

Additionally, there are currently 33 career advising coaches supporting middle schools. Career Advising Coaches introduce students to a variety of Career Advising sessions grounded in the RIASEC career advising language. Coaches help students unpack their strength, interest, and values and engage students in a dialogic process that causes students to clarify their future post-secondary options. The dialogic process helps students reflect on the following key questions:

- Who am I?
- How am I growing?
- What are my options?
- Where am I headed?

"Champion Teams" are in all MCPS middle schools which are educators from various disciplines who meet regularly to integrate career advising into their departments. These educator champions also lead a variety of school based activities such as field trips, guest speak series etc., to create a career-curious culture.

d. Identify, adequately publicize, and utilize partnerships, State-funded apprenticeships/entrepreneurships, "One-stop shops" and trade opportunities

In order to create further expansion and effectiveness, collaboration with County Partners (i.e. local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies) are also essential in the development of comprehensive career readiness programs for all youth. These partnerships can and will provide access to resources, expertise, and opportunities for internships or apprenticeships.

Within the state of Maryland, there are various also existing opportunities for Student Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship. Such programs include the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program.
This program is presently available to high school students in twenty (20) Maryland counties (Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Kent, Montgomery, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester) and Baltimore City through their school system. In addition, there are programs such as the Maryland Corps/Service Year Option where young adults 18 years old or older can receive the following benefits:

- Earn at least $15 an hour
- Receive professional development, on the job training, mentoring and time to explore potential career paths for your future.
- Career coaching and job seeking assistance throughout the Service Year, and upon completion of your year of service.

Members also receive $6,000 that can be paid out as a taxable cash stipend or deposited into a Maryland 529 account toward your future tuition costs.

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Additionally, it is also necessary to develop and implement multiple career path education and preparation models, as approaches may look different, depending upon diverse target populations (i.e. high school students, disconnected out-of-school youth, in-school youth and working young adults). Although these career path models will be diverse and may vary, the ultimate goals are the same – to ensure that the combination of education (academic and technical), work experience and school curriculums across all educational sectors (inclusive of secondary, postsecondary and adult education) all help to prepare individuals to advance efficiently and effectively towards a career path, in order to promote better life choices and persistence in life.

One multiple career paths model, available through the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-128 (WOIA) administered by the Department of Labor, is a "One-stop shop". Models of this approach include WorkSource Montgomery (WSM), a promising model which provides comprehensive services to the above stated target populations with preparation for employment, postsecondary education opportunities and educational and/or skills training credentials for secure employment with career and promotional opportunities.

WorkSource Montgomery has several programs of which one, Launch Your Future Employment (LYFE), services youth and young adults (Ages 14-24, but mostly ages 16-24) and provides to program-qualified individuals paid 16-week "on-the job-training" and work experience programs emphasizing career exploration and job readiness training. LYFE provides guidance to secure either full-time employment, apprenticeship or a training program offer, or support to return to school for (additional) certification(s) and/or degree(s). There are additional incentives and stipends provided, based upon acceptance and enrollment. There is presently a waitlist for this Program, with the implication of a high interest in individual career development and growth.

WSM works with community partners in order to identify participants who fit the necessary qualifications to benefit from the Program. As of April 2024, after discussion with Bridget Flaherty, WSM's Out of School Youth Program Manager, this Organization has now completed three (3) cohort LYFE programs, with nineteen (19) young people served, and have recently placed seven (7) of those participants in work experience or training opportunities. WSM is in the process of securing placement for the remaining twelve (12) participants.

It is imperative that the promotion of, accessibility to, and the expansion of these types of programs continue to be a County priority as they are essential to the success of Montgomery County's youth and young adult populations. "One-stop shop" partnerships with MCPS and throughout the community will encourage career readiness development and will become prevalent, as more training, apprenticeships and job opportunities become available. With an appropriate mandate of Career Readiness and education development for the youth, all individuals and target groups will be prepared, not to mention enthusiastic, about these program models available and accessible to them.

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As a part of Maryland's WIOA State Plan (2020-2024), the Benchmarks of Success for WSM's programs are built around five major strategic goals to increase the earning capacity of Maryland's workforce system customers by: Maximizing access to employment, the use of skills and credentialing, the use of life management skills, eliminating barriers to employment and strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of Maryland's workforce system.

Additionally, Arthur Williams reports that MCPS is working with WSM to convene a 6th grade in-demand industry experience. To that end, MCPS-TV and WSM have identified a focus group of students that will ask representatives from several in-demand industries about their experiences. This session will be recorded and pushed out to all career advising coaches to share with students in their schools. In addition, the recording will be uploaded on YouTube for all to view.

The implementation of "one-stop shops", and the like, will assist to accomplish these goals expansion, inclusion and effectiveness. The "shops" provide a central point of service for access to those seeking employment and the necessary training, certifications and related services. The existence and execution of these "shops", with collaborating partners, substantially affect positive outcomes, not only directly to those individuals, but to the Montgomery county community at large.

3. Identify ongoing challenges and resolutions in neighboring counties

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted society in many ways, but its impact on our children and young adults is still being felt. One does not have to know someone who died from COVID-19 to understand the impact of the virus. Hundreds of thousands were hospitalized, landmark life events and milestones were delayed or missed altogether, and routines were disrupted.

The uncertainty surrounding the spread of the virus called for drastic measures to protect the health of county students and their families, teachers, and school staff. In Montgomery County, students were quickly moved to virtual learning platforms to continue learning and parents became teachers' aides and tech support to help their children ensure improvement of their educational development.

For the better part of two years, the nation grappled with how to respond to the virus. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is supporting research of children to study how changes to routine, virtual schooling, caregiver absence or loss, financial instability and mask wearing "influenced cognitive, social and emotional development during the pandemic."

As ongoing research continues by the National Institute Health on the effects of the pandemic, it is also known that the pandemic has had a greater impact on young people and those from racial and ethnic minority groups. One NIH study found teen brains aged prematurely during the pandemic – an issue that can correlate with depression, anxiety, and addiction in the future and a higher risk, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. This finding aligns with other findings from a World Health Organization report that found the isolation during the pandemic increased stress, irritability, panic, sleep problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

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Researchers from the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University (CEPR) and Stanford University's Educational Opportunity Project looked at data related to pandemic learning loss and found the average U.S. public school student in grades 3-8 lost the equivalent of a half year of learning in math and a quarter of a year in reading. The researchers also reviewed data from the decade prior to the pandemic to see how students bounced back after significant learning loss due to disruption in their schooling. The evidence shows that schools do not naturally bounce back. Affected students recovered 20%-30% of the lost ground in the first year, but then made no further recovery in the subsequent three to four years.

While the most severe parts of the pandemic are over, its impact will continue to linger as students of all ages struggle academically and emotionally.

CEO of the American Psychological Association Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D., noted during the early stages of the pandemic that "when people experience these kinds of traumas people after 911, or Hurricane Katrina, that we expect to see people experiencing problems for at least another seven to 10 years out."

The post-pandemic recovery is ongoing and resources will be needed for many years and resources, including unused Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) funds can be used to address some of the deficiencies in our services to youth. As we are addressing the need for more career readiness and education, our young people will continue to need the support of Montgomery County's leaders to fund increased counseling and other services to help them recover from this unprecedented event in the post-pandemic period and beyond.

Montgomery County must also prepare its youth workforce to successfully meet the demands of an evolving workplace being transformed by technological advances, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and minimize possibilities for misalignment of industry credentials (which has led to oversupply in certain Career Technology and Education (CTE) areas nationally). Continued replication of successful CTE models such as the Thomas Edison High School of Technology may be a positive strategy.

It is recommended that the Montgomery County Council conduct a Site Visit and Town Hall at Edison during a regular school day to observe and carefully consider needed additions and enhancements to existing programs. At the college level, Montgomery College provides such CTÉ services. It is in the preliminary stages of creating a "view book," targeted to middle schoolers, that will provide CTE and summer school program information.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

Presently, Montgomery County offers rising juniors and seniors career-based learning opportunities during the summer months through the Summer RISE (Reimagining an Innovative Student Experience) initiative. According to the Summer RISE website, it is the goal of the MCPS Department of Partnerships to collaborate with other businesses, government agencies, higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations to provide hands-on learning, professional and transferable technical skills and career-based opportunities and experiences for this target group. More promotion, publicity and accessibility should be placed on this program, as well an extensive and continual focus on longstanding, engaged and impactful collaborative partnerships. In order to ensure effective and optimal results and success for the County's youth, we recommend that this Program remain adequately funded to increase the number of youth applicants who are able to gain acceptance.

Additionally, we note that neighboring counties also have college and career readiness programs. In Prince George's County, the PGCPS school system has published a College Pathways guidebook for students to utilize with guidance from their school counselor and parents. The focus in this document is to provide a calendar timeline and to help students and families stay on track with applying to college and pursuing career pathways. The guidebook includes information and checklists regarding specific tasks needed to complete college applications like taking the SAT, preparing essays, and filling out FAFSA forms. ("PGCPS Guide")

Additionally, Prince George's County's *Summer Youth Enrichment Program* (SYEP) assists "youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 with enriching and constructive summer work experiences in community organizations, private sector companies, and government agencies." ("PGC SYEP") And, for 18 - 22 year olds who complete a summer with SYEP, Prince George's County offers them opportunities through the *Youth@Work Internship Program* which partners with *Employ Prince George's, Inc.* Through this partnership "young adults have access to job readiness training, internships, apprenticeships, supportive services, and leadership and soft skills training." ("PGC Youth@Work")

Similarly, Howard County's Office of Workforce Development offers a paid *Summer Youth Program* for teens and young adults. The program provides development and training for youth to enter the workforce. ("HC Summer Youth Program") Howard County was also selected to participate in a program led by the National Association of Counties called *Counties for Career Success* which aims to "facilitate cross-systems collaboration between systems of post-secondary education, workforce development and human services." ("HC Counties for Career Success")

Despite the numerous benefits of these programs and others similar to them, it is also necessary to address some of their shortcomings. Many of these programs rely on school system participation, age limits, and/or geographic availability. In order to create more effective services for youth in Montgomery County, it is imperative to implement the subcommittee's recommendations in a way that prioritizes accessibility to all youth while also mirroring some of the successes of already established state programs.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

Montgomery County can significantly improve support for juvenile offenders in their journey toward career readiness by implementing various initiatives and programs:

1. Collaboration with County Partners: Partnering with local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies can develop comprehensive career readiness programs. These partnerships provide access to resources, expertise, and opportunities for internships or apprenticeships, offering juvenile offenders practical experience and professional connections .

2. Educational and Skills Programs: Expanding educational and skills programs within juvenile detention centers or probation services can help young offenders earn high school diplomas or GEDs. Workshops in resume writing, job interviewing, financial literacy, and conflict resolution can further enhance their employability .

3. Work-Based Learning Opportunities: Creating opportunities for practical work experience through internships, job shadowing, or on-the-job training programs allows juvenile offenders to develop marketable skills. Partnering with local businesses willing to provide these opportunities helps youth build professional networks and gain valuable experience .

4. Mentorship Programs: Establishing mentorship programs that pair juvenile offenders with community mentors can provide guidance, support, and positive role modeling. Mentors offer career advice, assist with goal setting, and help youth navigate challenges in pursuing their career aspirations .

5. Post-Release Support Services: Providing support services to juvenile offenders upon their release is crucial. These services include job placement assistance, access to housing, transportation, healthcare, and mental health services. Ensuring continuity of care during the transition from incarceration to community life is essential for successful reintegration, reducing recidivism, and fostering long-term success .

Final Recommendations to Improve Youth Career Readiness Outcomes in Montgomery County
- Streamline and centralize the information on the MCPS website for students and parents, to include differentiating academic and experiential programs from advising and support divisions. Create an easy-to-follow roadmap for families and students to navigate the CCR material on the MCPS website.
- Complete comprehensive research and analysis on current communication systems and invest in an infrastructure to improve access to career readiness and preparedness resources for students and families of Montgomery County.

Commission Priority: Career Readiness

- Standardize the integration of career and job readiness initiatives into all of MCPS's middle and high school student experience. This includes resources for countywide career readiness initiatives such as:
  - Job and Internship Fairs
  - Field trips
  - Required job readiness courses for full or half credit
  - Incentivizing public and private community partnerships
  - Incorporate career education/career readiness and available career opportunities into the school curriculum
- Identify and extensively publicize "One-stop" shops to maximize accessibility to job and trade opportunities

These initiatives are excellent opportunities for enrichment; however, oversight and consistent enforcement is necessary to ensure proper outreach and results-driven improvements. Further metrics tracking is needed in order to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives for continuation, enhancement and/or replacement.

We believe these recommendations are so imperative that we feel compelled to restate the conclusory recommendation of 2021 Commission Report that "County executives conduct a county-wide self-audit of the existing programs every four years to identify the priorities/adjustments, accessibility and equitability component in alignment with population and census."

Additionally, in this regard, it is suggested that the 2021 Report be reconsidered for immediate implementation.

2024-2025 Commission Policy Priorities

2024-2025 Policy Priorities
for the
Commission on Children and Youth

Annually, during its annual retreat, the Commission on Children and Youth identifies emerging needs to drive its research and recommendations of policy priorities to the Montgomery County leadership and child/youth-serving agencies. Policy priorities are presented to the County Council's HHS Committee and County Executive for approval as the focus for the Commission each year.

Online Safety for Montgomery County Children & Youth

The Commission seeks to explore existing and necessary safeguards that exist to ensure the mental and physical safety of Montgomery County children and youth. The Commission will explore recommendations of universal policies and safeguarding practices that are promoted across youth-serving agencies and organizations.

Naloxone (Narcan) and Naloxone Education & Youth Addiction Support Access

The Commission is interested in reviewing the level of Naloxone education for children and youth as a part of first aid standard policies and procedures for youth-serving agencies such as schools. The Commission's focus will extend to examining the availability and accessibility of resources and programs that specifically serve young populations experiencing substance use disorder and addiction.

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