

Commission on Aging Montgomery County, Maryland 2023 Annual Report



Commission on Aging, May 2023 Public Forum

L to R Top Row: CoA Commissioners: Jean Dinwiddie, David Engel, Marsha Weber, Mary Sweeney, Betsy Carrier - Public Forum Committee Co-Chair, Janice Zalen, Yvette Monroe. Front Row: Marcia Pruzan - CoA Alumna, Commissioners: Joyce Dubow, Virginia Cain, Sibon Ncube, Barbara Selter, Laurie Pross, Mona Grieser, Pazit Aviv - Village Coordinator, Dr. Odile Brunetto - Chief Aging & Disability Services, Wayne Berman - Public Forum Committee Co-Chair. Commissioners not in photo: Nikiru Ezeani, Beverly Rollins, Morris Klein, Ryan Wilson, Arunima Ghosh, Bob Levey, Kendell Matthews, Ruby Moon, Ric Riccardi, Arthur Williams

Boards, Committees, and Commissions
Department of Health and Human Services

February 2024



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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, David Engel



The Montgomery County Commission on Aging (CoA) is pleased to provide its Annual Report for 2023. The Report describes the key activities of the Commission as an advisor to County Executive, County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as other County departments 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 2023, the Commission on Aging had a robust schedule of monthly educational meetings and achieved significant accomplishments within the four very active Commission committees which are outlined in this report. The Commission started the year meeting in January with the newly expanded County Council. This meeting served as an introduction to the several new Councilmembers on the priorities and activities of the CoA and proved to be an invaluable initiation to the needs and interest of our older adult residents.

The Commission met again with every Councilmember in the Spring in small group settings to advocate for the CoA's FY24 Budget priorities and advocate for issues of importance to our older residents. The full Commission on Aging met with County Executive Elrich in March to exchange views on the FY24 proposed Budget. The CoA members were able to voice concerns on the increases in property tax and hear the County Executive's perspective prior to the County Council negotiations.

I was fortunate to attend Montgomery County Recreation Department's Centenarian Celebration on May 12. It was a well-planned and wonderful event celebrating our 76 centenarians in Montgomery County with two, in particular, turning 107 in 2023. The celebration included any resident who was at least 100 years old (centenarian) and their families.

The Commission on Aging has been very successful at conducting its meetings by Zoom since the Covid 19 pandemic changed meetings forever at the start of 2020. The Commission has had very few in-person meetings since February 2020. On June 22, 2023, the CoA meeting was held at the Wheaton Senior and Recreation Center. It was highlighted by a Senior Nutrition lunch with Senior Nutrition Program summary given by Carol Craig, the Director of the Senior Nutrition Program.



Commissioners attending the Senior Citizens Day Proclamation: Yvette Monroe, Virginia Cain, Laurie Pross, Arthur Williams, and David Engel

On Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2023, Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles presented a proclamation for National Senior Citizens Day at the County Council office building in Rockville. The Commission on Aging was joined by Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging and Disability Services; Eric Friedman, Office of Consumer Protection; Robin Riley, Department of Recreation; Shane Rock, Jewish Council for the Aging; and other local nonprofits. On behalf of the CoA, I was invited to share remarks which in part pledged to continue the CoA's unwavering advocacy and support, ensuring that our seniors receive the respect and care they truly deserve. I stated that the proclamation serves as a reminder that we must cherish, respect, and support our older adult citizens every day, not just on this special occasion.

The Commission's significant activities in 2023 included:

The CoA worked with staff from Johns Hopkins and Access HEARS to initiate a hearing intervention program to assist low-income older adults in obtaining hearing devices and navigating the process of selecting new over-the-counter hearing aids. This pilot for Montgomery County has been funded through Aging and Disability Services with the use of ARPA funds. We will advocate for the continuation of this first-of-its-kind program in Montgomery County.

Aging in Community Committee spearheaded a robust two panel Public Forum event entitled *Smart Home – Smarter Care: Technology to Help Older Adults Age in Place*. The Keynote Speaker was Scott Code with Leading Age's Center for Aging Services Technology. With the help of the Department of Technology & Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS), the event provided a very successful hybrid experience for 100 online attendees in addition to the 90 in person attendees.

The Health and Wellness Committee researched, edited, and printed for mass distribution a multi-piece handout entitled *Planning for Life Transitions as We Age*. It consists of a pocket folder with 4 fact sheets titled: Starting the Conversation, Taking Charge of your Health Care, Housing, Legal and Financial Matters, and an 11 x17 personal resource inventory worksheet.

The Communications Committee has embarked on an Ambassador presentation roadshow of County services and resources at senior living communities, senior centers, and libraries. They have instituted a Library Liaison program designed to make sure all Montgomery County libraries have an older adult resource area.

In October, the County's Age Friendly Initiative with the Commission on Aging held its first Summit on Aging since 2015. County Executive Elrich, Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, and Director of Health and Human Services, Dr. James Bridgers, Jr. were among the presenters. The Keynote speaker was Carmel Roques, Department of Aging, Secretary. She spoke about preparing and planning for a longevity-resilient Maryland and has initiated a multi-sector plan on aging. Among her goals is to match the health span with the life span as the average age of Marylanders increases. Secretary Roques was a guest speaker at a Commission on Aging meeting this April discussing these issues.

Home and Community Based Services was the focus of our 2022 Public Forum on "In Home Care, We Can Do Better". The County Executive formed a task force to provide recommendations to improve the County's efforts to recruit, train, and retain the direct care workforce. The Commission's immediate past chair, Barbara Selter, along with Patrice McGhee, Chief of Aging and Disability Services were instrumental in the research and authoring the Task Force report. The County Task Force report has over 20 recommendations; many of which need support at the County and State Level. One of our top FY 25 County Budget priorities is to hire an implementation manager to ensure that recommendations from its Workforce Task Force Report are fully recognized and addressed.

During the 2022 session of the Maryland General Assembly, legislation was enacted creating the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis (SB440). The CoA is certain there are synergies to explore between the recommendations of each study. We look forward to examining the December 2023 final report and will advocate for implementing the important recommendations of both reports.

At the December 2023 luncheon event, the Commission on Aging was proud to recognize the service and dedication given to the CoA by two Commissioners whose second term has ended. I was able to give a certificate from the CoA and from the County Executive to Marsha Weber for her relentless pursuit of helping older adults through her term as chair of the Health and Wellness Committee. Ryan Wilson also received certificates for his dedication, knowledge, and contributions given in his time as Commissioner and Chair of the Public Policy Committee.

The Commission on Aging could not have made any accomplishments without the support of County staff. In this regard, we express our deep appreciation to DHHS Director Dr. James Bridgers, Jr. In addition, we acknowledge the wise counsel and outstanding support and

guidance of the recently retired Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief of Montgomery County's Aging and Disability Services, and Dr. Patrice McGhee, previous Director of Montgomery County's Area Agency on Aging who has taken over as Chief of Aging & Disability Services. We look forward to working with the new AAA Director, Dr. Kimberly Johnson.

The following AAA staff also provide invaluable and outstanding assistance to the Commission: Peter Flandrau, Community Outreach Manager and primary liaison to the CoA, the Executive Committee and the Public Policy Committee; Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator and liaison to the Aging in Community Committee; Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator, liaison to the Health and Wellness Committee; and Jennifer Long, Supervisor of the Aging and Disability Resource Unit (ADRU) and liaison to the Communications Committee. Their contributions are invaluable to the Commission and to the well-being of all older adults in the County. We are also fortunate to work with Shawn Brennan as the Age Friendly Coordinator and the leader for the Summit on Aging.

The Commission looks forward to ongoing engagement and positive action on matters that significantly affect the quality of life of the County's older adult residents and their families.

Respectfully,

David Engel

David Engel, Chair

Annual Report from the Commission on Aging January-December 2023

BCC Representative: David Engel, Chair; Joyce Dubow, Secretary

Mission

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging (COA) advises the County Executive, County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as other County departments on the interests, needs and problems facing older adults in Montgomery County. The Commission identifies significant issues where its voice on the needs of older adults can make a difference. The COA supports both safety-net services for the frail elderly and programs to meet the interests and needs of the county's older adult residents who want to age in their communities.

Composition

The Commission on Aging consists of no fewer than 18 members appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Council. At the conclusion of 2023, there were 26 members. Members must be county residents of whom a majority are age 60 and older. Members 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.

CoA Membership 2023

Wayne Berman, Virginia Cain, Betsy Carrier, Jean Dinwiddie, Joyce Dubow, David Engel, Nkiru Ezeani, Arunima Ghosh, Mona Grieser, Morris Klein, Bob Levy, Kendell Matthews, Yvette Monroe, Sibon Ncube, Laurie Pross, Richard Ricciardi, Beverly Rollins, Barbara Selter, Katie Smith, Mary Sweeney, Marsha Weber, T. Ryan Wilson, Arthur Williams, Janice Zalen

New Commissioners as of October 2023

Linda Bergofsky, Rena Eichler, Norman Goldstein, Anna Maria Izquierdo-Porrera, Marie Sloan, Kate Stein, Kathleen M. McGuinness

Commission Officers

David Engel, Chair

Virginia Cain, Vice Chair

Wayne Berman, Assistant Vice Chair

Joyce Dubow, Secretary

Nkiru Ezeani, Treasurer

Committee Chairs

Aging in Community: Wayne Berman and Betsy Carrier

Health and Wellness: Marcia Pruzan (CoA Alumna) and Marsha Weber

Public Policy: Morris Klein and Ryan Wilson

Communications: Jean Dinwiddie and Beverly Rollins

Staff

Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging and Disability Services; Dr. Kimberly Johnson, Acting Director, Area Agency on Aging; Pazit Aviv, Village Coordinator; Peter Flandrau, Community Outreach Manager; Tremayne Jones, Office Services Coordinator; Tina Purser-Langley, Senior Health and Wellness Coordinator, Jennifer Long, Supervisor, ADRU

Liaisons

Denise Israel, Sam Oji, Faisal Khan, Montgomery County Department of Transportation; Shawn Brennan, Age-Friendly Montgomery; Jim Resnick, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue; Robin Riley, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Stacey Sigler, Sara Swarr, Kathleen Lieberman, Montgomery County Department of Recreation; Arlee Wallace, African American Health Program; Monique Gardner, African American Health Program; Tiffany Ward, Montgomery County Racial Equity Program; Phoebe Shih, Asian American Health Initiative; Somer Cross, Department of Housing and Community Affairs; Carl Morgan, Park and Planning; Carol Craig, Senior Nutrition Program; Ingrid Lizama, Latino Health Initiative; Faith Chance, Office of Community Partnerships

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..." The AAA continues to work closely with our peers and allies in DHHS to ensure all-encompassing service delivery and to provide credible and timely communication to the older adults in our community.

Monthly Meetings

Commission on Aging (COA) meetings were open to the public and were held from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of each month (except for August). The October meeting was replaced by the *Summit on Aging* held on October 26, 2023. In 2023, most meetings were held virtually. Minutes of all meetings were posted on the CoA website.

The Commission has four standing committees: Health and Wellness, Aging in the Community, Public Policy, and Communications, as well as an Executive Committee, each of which met at least monthly. All meetings were open to the public except the Executive Committee. With the exception of the Executive Committee, members of the standing committees were not required to be commissioners to participate. The Executive committee consisted of the officers of the commission and the chairs of the committees. Occasionally, working groups were established to work on a particular issue that required specific focus, such as the working group that planned and organized the annual forum sponsored by the CoA in May. Following is a brief description of the work of the standing committees during 2023:

Health and Wellness - The committee worked on the development of its Life Transitions project that included a series of factsheets that address important issues older adults should consider as they age. This compendium of materials includes useful resources for additional information and a worksheet.

Aging in Community - The committee conceived, organized, and executed the CoA's annual Public Forum in May 2023. (See section on Forum, below.) Beyond focusing on technology to help people age in place, the Aging in Community Committee (AIC) focused on accessible and affordable housing for older adults, food insecurity, design for life and universal design, and the Villages. Specific AIC concerns about housing were addressed in meetings between County officials and the AIC in preparation for the 2024 Public Forum on housing. The committee was briefed several times on the progress of the County Task Force, led by Somer Cross of DHCA, on revisions to the MPDU program to include new senior living communities.

Public Policy - The committee monitored and reviewed legislative proposals of significance to older adults at the county and state levels and identified proposals that merited the commission's support. In addition, the committee continued to advocate for resolving concerns about nursing home inspections in the county. Members met with the newly elected governor's transition team to describe frustration and concern in dealing with state agencies on the issue; wrote to the newly appointed Secretary of Health of Maryland describing the ongoing concerns; and continued to be in contact with appropriate county officials to try and reach an appropriate resolution to concerns about failure of the state to conduct and oversee an effective nursing home inspection process.

Communications - The Committee helped maintain the commission's website and continued to update the CoA member orientation booklet and Briefing book to ensure they are current. The committee planned and implemented a Library Liaison and Ambassadors program and

planned and broadcast the 50+ program on the county cable channel where guests from a variety backgrounds and organizations were interviewed. (See below.)

Major Accomplishments

- **Advocacy**

- ***CoA FY 2024 Budget Priorities***

The top two FY2024 Budget priorities presented to the County Council and County Executive were: 1 - Hire one full-time equivalent position within Aging and Disability Services to serve as a Coordinator for older adult Communications and Outreach to improve awareness of County programs for older adults. Many residents are unaware of services available for older adults. Therefore, the CoA urges the Council to provide funding to DHHS to hire one full-time equivalent position within Aging and Disability Services to serve as Coordinator for Communications and Outreach.

2 - Increase funding for In-Home Aide Services (IHAS) for both DHHS staff and contract budgets. The older adult population of Montgomery County is rising at an unprecedented rate. Older adults prefer to remain in their own homes and seek home and community-based services (HCBS) to avoid or postpone nursing home placement. The State of Maryland offers programs that assist low-income, disabled, and elderly individuals to live in the community, including Medicaid waivers and assistance from other State and Federal funding. Eligibility guidelines (financial and medical) are strict and waiting lists are long. As of 9/19/22, approximately 140 residents were on the Social Services to Adults (SSTA) waitlist waiting to receive an assessment for Home Care Services.

- ***CoA FY 2025 Budget Priorities***

In October, the commission chair, David Engel, presented the commission's FY2025 top two budget priorities to the county council: 1 - Hire a permanent Marketing and Outreach staff person in the Department of Aging Disability Services to promote the many County programs available to older adults; and 2 - Hire a full-time Implementation Manager to ensure that the County Executive mandated Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Workforce Task Force recommendations are fully recognized and implemented.

- **Legislative advocacy**

At the state level, the commission offered comments/support for the following bills:

- SB0397 requiring private insurers to cover the cost of hearing aids
- HB0028 to provide a tax credit for caregivers who care for older family members
- HB0318 to require the Maryland Department of Health to increase the hourly reimbursement rate for certain personal assistance services and require provider agencies to pay the greater of \$16 per hour or 64 percent of the reimbursement rate to personal care aides
- SB0845 that would authorize an individual, under very specific circumstances, to request aid in dying
- SB0397 to require private insurers to cover the cost of hearing

- **Legislative Breakfast**

This annual event was held virtually on December 7, 2023. Over 15 delegates/senators or their representatives attended, all of whom discussed their 2024 initiatives. The commission heard that there will be numerous proposals addressing the needs of older adults during the upcoming legislative session (2024), including a study of how to develop a viable long-term care insurance program in Maryland. In addition, there was considerable interest among the members of the delegation concerning the failure of OHCQ to communicate with the county and the commission about nursing home inspections with several members offering to pursue this issue.

- **Education**

The commission routinely received educational briefings from experts on topics of importance to its work and often received recommendations as to how it could be most effective in the areas under discussion. Educational presentations included Q and A sessions. Following is a summary of the speakers who addressed the commission during the year:

- *Donna Smith, Area Campaign Director for Compassion and Choices* discussed HB-0933 (End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act))

Note: The commission prefers to receive information that presents all sides of an issue. In the case of HB-0933, there was a concerted effort by the chair and members of the Executive Committee to find a speaker who opposed this proposal in order to have a balanced discussion about its provisions. However,

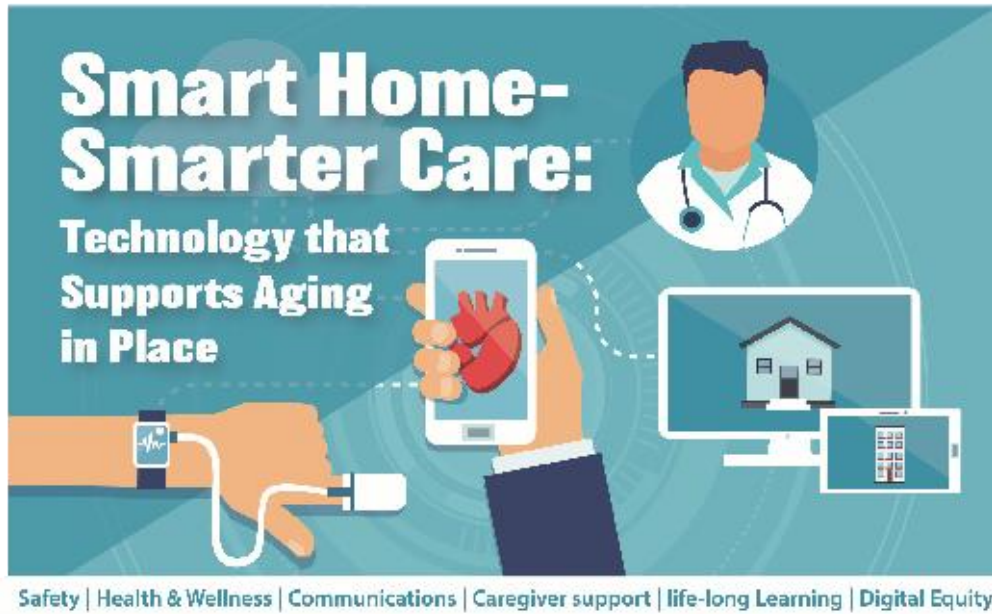
they were unable to find someone willing to address the Commission. In light of the widespread interest in the topic, the chair referred to any of known opponents to the bill and summarized concerns they had raised when similar legislative had been proposed in earlier sessions of the state legislature, as far back as 2015 and as recently as 2020. He noted that many in the Montgomery delegation supported the bill and that similar legislation already had been enacted in Or, WA, NM, CA, VT, NJ, Montana, CO, ME, DC, and Hawaii.

- *County Executive, Marc Elrich* summarized his recommended FY 24 operating budget, emphasizing priorities applicable to older adults. He acknowledged the CoA's interest in for increased access to home and community-based services, transportation solutions, and communications support for Aging and Disability Services. He reported that many of these priorities were met in his proposed budget.
- *Marla Lahat, Home Care Partners*, provided a presentation on the full landscape of home care programs from light care, to respite care, and home and community-based services through Medicaid. The presentation included Home Care Partners' role in the Montgomery County IHAS program, the City of Gaithersburg's light care, and the partnership with Community Reach in Rockville. The presentation also included the contracts that Home Care Partners has with the DC government for DC Safe at Home for home modifications and the DC Caregivers Institute providing social work case management, support groups and educational programs.
- *Jeannie Fuglesten Biniek, Associate Director, Program on Medicare Policy at Kaiser Family Foundation and Marge Ginsberg, SHIP counselor; Volunteer with HICAP (Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program), CA's Medicare counseling program and member of Expert Advisory Committee on Building a Circuit of Civic Learning, Center for Practical Bioethics*, provided an overview of the Medicare program and challenges Medicare beneficiaries face in navigating the program.
- *Laurie Orlov, founder of Aging and Health Technology Watch*, discussed market research, trends, blogs and reports that provide thought leadership, analysis, and guidance about health and aging-related technologies and services that enable boomers and older adults to sustain and improve their quality of life.
- *Matt Losak, CEO of Renters Alliance*, characterized the current situation of increasing residential rents as "forced migration of working and low-income families" and described two competing bills that had been introduced in the County Council: The HOME Act; and the Anti-gouging Rent Protection bill.

- *Carmel Roques, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging*, described the functions of her department. She noted it was one of the smallest departments both in size of staff and funding. The Older Americans Act and the state provide most of its funding. Therefore, to have impact, the department must be able to collaborate and leverage funding and policy opportunities in other departments, such as housing, planning, and transportation. Secretary Roques discussed the rationale for a Multi-sector Plan for Aging.
- *Jenna Crawley is the Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging and Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA), Director*. She described three essential, interrelated components of the MPA: the State Plan on Aging, the Age-Friendly Action Plan, and the Multi-Sector Plan for Aging, the latter of which builds on the first two and represents the “how” we will achieve the desired goals.
- *Councilmember Gabe Albornoz* addressed the FY24 budget and predicted that there will be challenges ahead. He cited the need to address education and the need to remain competitive regarding salaries for teachers. Much of the enacted tax increase for FY24 will go to education. However, the Department of HHS fared well too, particularly because it provides direct services to the many residents in our racially and culturally diverse County.
- *Legislative Analyst, Tara Clemons Johnson* discussed the FY24 budget process and the sequence of events leading to final passage by the council. For the FY24 budget, the budget process included an Operating Budget Equity Tool that was required of all departments in developing their budgets. Specifically, proposals were evaluated on how they addressed and reduced/eliminated disparities or improved outcomes for communities of color and low incomes.
- *Fatimah Aure, MPP Director, Field Building Capacity, The Kelsey Building Opportunities Through Inclusivity, Joseph Knackstedt, Deputy Manager of Community Development, D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development. Betsy Luecking, Outreach Coordinator, Montgomery County* briefed the commission on universal design and its implementation as well as the history and use of the Design for Life (DFL) program in Montgomery County.
- **Publications** available on the CoA website at:
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/COA/COAIndex.html>
 - *“Planning for Life Transitions As We Age”*
 - *Public Forum Report: “Smart Home- Smarter Care- Technology that Supports Aging in Place”*
 - *2023 Commission on Aging Briefing Book*

- **Commission On Aging – Letters**

- February 1, 2023 – Congratulations to newly appointed Maryland Department of Aging, Secretary, Carmel Roques. Included an invitation to meet the CoA.
- February 13, 2023 – Letter to Dr. Patrice McGhee, Director, AAA, to request a coordinated effort between the CoA and the “Connectors” and “Marketing Broker” to work on establishing the Ambassador Program.
- March 20, 2023 - Letter to Montgomery County Planning Department in response to the Pedestrian Master Plan. The CoA offered general support and requested additional emphasis and recognition to areas where the senior population may be impacted.
- May 16, 2023 – Letter to Laura Herrera Scott, MD Secretary of Health congratulating on her appointment to Secretary and following up on details from her letter in February 2023 at the OHCQ Budget Hearing. The CoA informed the Secretary of requests for information from OHCQ which have not been responded to.
- August 1, 2023 – Letter to Dr. James Bridgers, Jr. to explain how it will implement their vaccination plan, including communication strategies through the PIO and other resources. Dr. Bridgers responded September 8th on the DHHS plan.
- August 23, 2023 – Letter in support of JCA’s application to MWCOG Transportation Planning Board for funding under the 2023 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program.
- September 29, 2023 – Letter to Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging and Disability Services asking that a staff person be explicitly assigned the responsibility to coordinate the Commission’s Ambassador and Library Liaison Programs and to ensure print materials requested for these programs are available and distributed in a timely manner.
- November 3, 2023 – Letter to Anita Vassallo, Director, Montgomery County Librarians to thank her for the support of the CoA Library Liaison Program and providing an update on the activities of the Liaisons.



- **Public Forum**

On May 4, 2023, the Montgomery County Commission on Aging, in conjunction with the City of Gaithersburg’s Active Aging Expo, convened a Forum in the Activity Center at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg titled “Smart Homes – Smarter Care: Technology that Supports Aging in Place.” National experts and local practitioners described how technology can help older adults remain safe and independent in their homes. The Active Aging Expo showcased many of these technologies in the Exhibit Hall. The audience, present at the forum and virtually, consisted of older adults, family caregivers, government officials, representatives from not-for-profit agencies, and others. The video and final report of the Public Forum are available on the Commission on Aging website under “Helpful Resources” (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/COA/COAindex.html>).



Scott Code, Leading Age, Keynote



Commissioners Mona Grieser, Sibon Ncube checking in participants

- **Summit on Aging**

On October 26, 2023, the Summit on Aging was held at the Silver Spring Civic Center. Several members of the commission collaborated with the Age-Friendly Montgomery workgroups in the planning and execution of this event. In addition, the commission had a table where participants could ask questions and obtain a range of materials, including the aforementioned “*Planning for Life Transition*” packet; “*Smart Home- Smarter Care: Technology that Supports Aging in Place;*” and the Commission’s 2023 Briefing Book. The video of the Summit on Aging, read ahead material for background, and the agenda are available at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/aging-summit.html>.

- **Outreach/Liaisons**

The commission routinely received updates from Dr. Patrice McGhee, Chief, Aging and Disability Services, and Dr. Kimberly Johnson, Director of the Montgomery County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to keep the commission apprised of pertinent activities of interest and importance to the work of the commission. These updates typically addressed budget issues, the disposition of ARPA funds and other funds, and special projects overseen by the AAA, and the like.

Liaison Reports - The Commission received reports from community non-profits, advocacy organizations, and county departments that informed the commission of relevant programs, projects, and activities they are conducting for the benefit of older adults.

The commission regularly heard from the African American Health Program; Age Friendly; the Asian American Health Initiative; the Latino Health Initiative; Department of Recreation; the Department of Transportation; Maryland National Park and Planning Commission; The Villages; and Jewish Council for the Aging.

The commission also received ad hoc reports from organizations seeking to coordinate/collaborate with the commission, such as Lindsay Luhn, Volunteer Center; Eric Colchamiro, head of government affairs at Alzheimer’s Association; Janine Tursini, Arts for the Ages, Somer Cross, DHCA; Brandon Bragg, Montgomery County Board of Social Services; County Council Aides; Christine Hong, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH); and others.

Talking about Mental Health

The [American Muslim Senior Society \(AMSS\)](#) held their second roundtable discussion on mental health disparities, including discrimination, systemic racism, cultural stigma, and limited access to culturally competent mental health resources. I shared how the Council's Health and Human Services Committee is focused on building bridges that improve accessibility for all.



Councilmember Albornoz participates in the Second AMSS Roundtable Discussion on Mental Health

Vice Chair, Virginia Cain, participated in the American Muslim Senior Society Mental Health Roundtable.

- **Other Collaborative Activities**

HCBS Workforce Task Force

Background: In 2022, the CoA Chair, worked with the Age Friendly Home and Community Services Work Group on a series of roundtables to address concerns associated with ensuring a sufficient supply of direct care workers to support Home and Community Based Services for Montgomery County citizens that resulted in the establishment the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Workforce Taskforce under the auspices of the Area Agency on Aging.

In 2023, the previous chair (who remains a commissioner) participated in the development and presentation to the county executive and council members of the final report. One of the commission's FY2025 budget priorities was based on a key recommendation of the HCBS Workforce task force. The commission continues to study the recommendations in the report to determine how the commission can best advance many of the task force's recommendations.



Library Liaison Program

Working with the County’s head librarian and Aging and Disability staff, the committee established a program where individual CoA members will be responsible for reviewing resource materials available at one of the Montgomery County Public Library branches. At the branch, the liaison will establish a working relationship with the librarian and make monthly visits to the library to ensure the library’s older adult section is organized, complete, and well-stocked. With the librarian, the CoA liaison will periodically evaluate the materials provided. The liaison will also work with CoA’s Aging and Disability staff to order new materials as needed.

Ambassadors Program

The committee developed a 6-month pilot Ambassador Program that seeks to educate older adults about the CoA, relevant County services, programs, issues and to solicit feedback regarding their concerns. Each Ambassador, along with a companion, will deliver an approved presentation to groups in the community. Presentations may take place at Senior Centers, congregate living facilities, libraries, and other locations where older adults gather. The presentations will be developed by the Committee members and Aging and Disability staff. One such program was presented at the Schweinhaut Senior Center in May, at which participants were given the County’s “File of Life” and “Connect with Montgomery County Aging and Disability Resources” magnets. Participants also offered valuable feedback on a range of topics that will contribute to the commission’s future work.

Cable TV 50+ in Montgomery County is a monthly television show hosted by the Commission on Aging. The show shares news and information of interest to senior residents of Montgomery County. Guests included: Marc Elrich County Executive, Evan Glass, County Council President, Megan Tracy Benson, Empowering the Ages, Kathleen Dennis, Heyman Intergenerational Center, Montgomery County Centenarians, Kathleen McGuinness, SmithLife Homecare, David Engel, Chair, Commission on Aging, Mary

Travaglini, Organic Lawn and Landscape Department of Environmental Protection, Sara Swarr and Kathleen Lieberon, Cindy Porter, CEO, Success Thru Style, Monica Barnett, CEO Blue Print for Style.

Age-Friendly Montgomery County

Montgomery County is a World Health Organization (WHO) /AARP designated Age-Friendly Community. 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 10 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. Together, these public and private sector partners plan for and guide work to 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. Jean Dinwiddie, past CoA Chair, is Co-Chair of the Age-Friendly Communications Domain workgroup.

Other Activities

Throughout the year, members of the commission attended community meetings and met or communicated with elected and other public and private sector representatives to present the perspective of the CoA and to provide input. In March 2023, the Commission wrote a letter of support (see letters) and recommendations for the Pedestrian Master Plan. We urged the Planning Board to recognize pedestrian safety needs of older adults as part of the policy and recommendations sections of the Master Plan, before it was approved. A key goal of the current chair has been to ensure that the needs and interests of older adults in the county are integral to all policy considerations. For example, commissioners attended meetings on homelessness, affordable housing, faith-based partnerships, town hall meetings related to the county budget, the Department of Recreation's Centenarian Celebration.

- **Community for A Lifetime Awards**

The purpose of the “Community for a Lifetime” (CLA) Award is to formally recognize the work being done in the County by individuals or organizations that contributes to the commission’s mission. A nominating committee consisting of commissioners and representatives of the public received and considered nominees. The group was chaired by Wayne Berman, commissioner.



CoA Commissioner Wayne Berman, Dr. Odile Brunetto, Chief Aging & Disability Services, David Engel, CoA Chair



Elva Jaldin, (center), Ingrid Lizama, Latino Health Initiative (right)



GROWS Board Members Kerri Donnelly, Abby Sakariyah, Meagan Sexton, President, CoA Commissioner Wayne Berman

At the May 2023 Public Forum, Wayne Berman, Commissioner, announced three recipients of the Commission on Aging’s “Community for a Lifetime” award: Dr. Odile Brunetto, Ms. Elva Jaldin, and GROWS (The Grassroots Organization for the Well-being of Seniors), represented by its president, Ms. Meagan Sexton.



At the December 2023, year-end CoA luncheon event, David Engel announced the following individuals for the CLA recognition: Ms. Mary Jo Deering, Washington Area Village Exchange (left photo); OASIS Metro Washington Lifelong Learning Program (middle photo) accepting the award for Oasis was the Executive Director, Ms. Anna Stokes, Executive Director, Leah Russi, Operations Manager, Janice Pliner, Oasis Program Manager, and Kathleen McDaniel, Oasis Intergenerational Tutor Coordinator; and Stuart Rosenthal, Publisher of the Beacon Newspaper.

Looking Ahead

During the latter part of 2023, the commission began to plan for 2024. In addition to discussing and advocating for the budget priorities identified during the summer of 2023 for inclusion in the FY 2025 county budget, the standing committees began to consider the issues that merited “a deeper dive”. The Health and Wellness committee began to consider aspects of mental health that merited further study and had significant impact on the lives of older adults; several committee meetings included speakers to address various aspects of this issue. Similarly, the Aging in Community committee identified affordable and accessible housing as an area that affects virtually all older adults in the county; this committee also heard from several experts to help it formulate an approach to address the issue. At the end of 2023, the commission as a whole voted that “Housing Reimagined” will be the topic of the 2024 Forum to be held in April/May. A work group to plan this event was formed.