



## Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCC)

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**Date: FY24 Q1 July-September, 2023**

**BCC: Commission on Aging (CoA)**

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

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging (CoA) continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of older adults can make a difference. This report presents the advocacy and educational activities of the CoA for the period of July-September 2023.

### **Activities Updates**

The Commission routinely received updates on relevant activities from the Director of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA). With the promotion of Dr. Patrice McGhee, Dr. Kimberly Johnson assumed the role of acting AAA director in August. In addition, the commission received updates from the liaisons from the Office of Community Partnerships (Faith Liaison); Montgomery County Departments of Recreation, Transportation, Parks and Planning, Senior Nutrition Program; the African American Health Program; the Asian American Health Initiative; Latino Health Initiative; Age-Friendly; The Villages; Montgomery County Summit on Aging.

### **Committee Meetings<sup>i</sup>**

The commission's standing committees met in July and September. The commission did not meet in August although several commissioners were engaged in commission activities (see below).

- *Aging in Community* – Following its highly successful organization and leadership of the commission's annual Forum in May, the AIC began considering issues to study. Members are particularly interested in studying housing as a potential focus of future work.
- *Health and Wellness*- The committee completed work on its Life Transitions project to ensure that the materials were available for distribution at the Summit on Aging in October. It also began considering its next area of focus that is likely to be some aspect of mental health of older adults.
- *Communications*- The committee continued working on its three major initiatives: the 50+ cable tv program, the Ambassador, and Library Liaison programs. Volunteers have been identified for the Ambassador and Library Liaison programs and programming and guests have been identified for the 50+ programs through November.
- *Public Policy*- The committee reviewed the status of the state legislative proposals that the commission had supported with advocacy letters, as well as the bills that the commission followed. These included: HB 0160 Income

Tax-Credit for Long-Term Care Premiums (Long-Term Care Relief Act of 2023). HB 0953 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program. SB 509 - requiring the Maryland Health Care Commission to provide certain information regarding the acquisition of a nursing home to the Office of Health Care Quality; requiring the Secretary of Health to consider the information before taking certain action regarding licensure to operate a nursing home; and generally relating to nursing homes. SB 622 - Medicaid Waiver Programs – Waitlist and Registry Reduction *End the Wait Act revisions.*

The commission wrote letters of support for the following proposals that either did not move out of committee or were ultimately not enacted: 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; HB318 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.

The CoA wrote a letter to the County Department of Health and Human Services asking for information on implementing and communicating the County's plan for vaccinations this Fall.

## **Identification of Budget Priorities**

In July, the commission meeting was devoted to a discussion of 15 potential county budget priorities that had previously been discussed by the subject-matter standing committees. Based on a vote of the full commission, the following priorities were identified for County Fiscal year 2025 as the top two to present to the County Executive and 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, including coordinating the CoA's innovative volunteer Ambassador and Library Liaison Programs. There is a glaring unmet need affecting every community in the County. Regardless of income or the language spoken -- residents are unaware of the vast array of services and programs available for older adults. Funding this position will help to narrow the critical communications gap to older adults. It will help ensure that our older residents receive necessary information about vaccination programs, dental services, in-home care, respite services; whom to call when they think they have been scammed, how to reach a Long-Term Care Ombudsman, learn about home repair programs to stay safe as they age in place, and how to obtain other life sustaining services provided by A & D such as Adult Protective Services. This position should provide outreach to the County's many diverse communities; support a library liaison program to ensure all public libraries have an older adult section with materials of interest to older adults; coordinate a County-wide Ambassadors Program; promote the Senior Nutrition program;

support the County's minority health programs; and more. The Public Information Office (PIO) now staffs nine departments, but notably, not Aging and Disability Services.

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 carried out. There is a growing crisis in Montgomery County of a dwindling direct service professionals (DSP) work force to meet the needs of our rapidly aging and increasingly diverse population. Access to high-quality and coordinated home and community-based care is a health care equity issue that disproportionately affects marginalized groups. There is a shortage in the workforce of DSPs to provide these services. The prevalence of low wages, difficult working conditions, lack of training, and limited opportunities for advancement have contributed to a national and local shortage of DSPs. Funding the position of Implementation Manager enables the County to begin to address a significant and vexing public policy issue affecting large numbers of older adults and their families. It will provide a single point of contact to plan, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the Task Force's pragmatic and innovative recommendations that are designed to address the shortage of DSPs by improving recruitment, training, and retention of these critical workers. Several other groups of stakeholders stand to gain as well: older adults requiring assistance to remain in their homes; providers of direct care worker services; public service providers and private employers. Finally, we note that this recommendation was also recommended by the Task Force convened by the County Executive to address the home health workforce crisis.

## **EDUCATION**

Note: The commission routinely receives presentations from experts on a range of issue of importance to older adults as a means of learning about emerging ideas; keeping abreast of current trends, etc. At these sessions, members of the commission and others are able to ask questions thus helping to expand knowledge of issues and policy areas of importance to older adults. Often, these sessions result in the decision to further explore certain topics.

In September, the presentation was about the Medicare program. 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 were the guest speakers. Dr. Fuglesten Biniek provided an overview of the Medicare program describing key features of its major components. Ms. Ginsberg described what makes Medicare so challenging for beneficiaries, including examples, and the role of the SHIP counselor.

## **Other Activities**

- Although there were no official CoA meetings during August, several Commissioners met with the Maryland Philanthropy Network (Elisabeth Hyleck and Liz Briscoe) and learned about that organization; the purpose of the meeting

was specifically to find out more about the landscape of Philanthropy in Maryland. As a follow-up, the commission chair will schedule a meeting with the Montgomery County office of the Greater Washington Community Foundation.

- A meeting was held with Community Reach members, Andrea Kempner-Wink, Managing Director, and William Mohan Program Manager for Senior Reach, to learn about their home care and home modification programs. On the call was former Secretary of Aging, Rona Kramer.
- A virtual meeting was held with Susan Ryan | CEO, Center for Innovation, The GREEN HOUSE Project | Pioneer Network. We shared the OLO on the Regulatory Framework and Issues Impacting the Quality of Care for nursing homes. David recalled that several years ago, Robert Jenkins presented to the commission on the Green House Nursing Home model. As yet, there is no evidence that this model has taken hold in Montgomery County; the organization representing the model is headquartered in Timonium, MD.
- On September 12<sup>th</sup> 2023, Councilmember Sayles presented the Commission on Aging a Proclamation honoring Senior Citizens Day. It was a photo opportunity before the County Council. In attendance were Dr. McGhee, Robin Riley, Director of the Recreation Department, Eric Friedman, Director at Office of Consumer Protection, and, Shane Rock, JCA, as well as several commissioners. David Engel, Chair provided remarks to the audience and County Council.
- Also in September, some Commissioners met with Atara Margolies, Planner III, Down County Planning and Larissa Klevan with Mont Co Planning, to go over the Silver Spring Streetscapes Standards Update.

### **New Business**

- David Engel stated that the commission must keep the nursing home oversight issue alive. The county is trying to have a memorandum of understanding reinstated. However, the State seems to prefer hiring more staff.
- David Engel also mentioned the need for greater oversight of assisted living facilities. regulation. Laurie Pross mentioned that she reviewed some of the proposed regulations and that in her view, they were inadequate and offered few protections to residents.
- The Commission Public Forum report on Smart Homes-Smarter Care is posted on its [website](#).
- Planning for Life Transitions as We Age is posted on the CoA [website](#).

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<sup>i</sup> The Commission has four standing committees and an Executive Committee, each of which meets once a month. These committees are: Health and Wellness, Aging in the Community, Public Policy, and Communications. All meetings are open to the public and members need not be commissioners to participate. The Executive committee consists of the officers of the commission and the chairs of the committees. Occasionally, a working group will be established to work on a particular issue that reports to a particular committee.