

GROWS Advocacy Committee report: 1/26/21

Topics:

**1)** The Advocacy Committee is drafting a letter that has the objective of spreading awareness of GROWS to organizations that intersect in the Older Adult Service Provider and Caregiver space.

**2) At the December CoA meeting:** Council Member Will Jawando discussed these topics:

- Housing issues, which is a huge concern for older adults. Montgomery County not only needs more housing, it needs more affordable housing. He introduced a proposal last week that would allow for different types of housing options.
- A renter protection bill, legislation that would not allow rents to be raised over a certain amount especially in “rising rent areas;” e.g., neighborhoods with close access to transportation. In addition, in light of the number of individuals who have lost their jobs during the pandemic, Mr. Jawando is trying to stop late fees from being charged.
- Issues of interest to the CoA, including how to keep a new budget, that has been greatly impacted by the pandemic, from impinging on the needs of older adults. Statistics are showing the racial inequality that the pandemic has uncovered; only 30 percent of the African-Americans who lost their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic have gone back to work, while 80 percent of white people have returned. Our society needs to protect those individuals who are most vulnerable during this time.

Council Member Jawando stated that it is necessary to look for efficiencies to deal with budget issues. Montgomery County is one of the wealthiest Counties in the country. In light of that he introduced a bill to have a progressive income tax because he believes that wealthier individuals should carry more of the tax load. Increasing the income tax by 3.5% on millionaires will bring in an additional \$100 million per year.

The **January CoA meeting** is on January 28<sup>th</sup> and Barry Hudson is the featured speaker. Barry is the Director of Communications for the MoCo Public Information Office.

**3) The CoA Task Force** to counter social isolation and loneliness in Montgomery County (SiLoS) is having its monthly meeting January 29th. Presentations by: Montgomery County Senior Centers, AAHI (photonovel) & AAHP (assessment tool). The Committee will discuss what the Senior Centers are doing to mitigate Social Isolation and Loneliness, prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic and plans for post-pandemic.

**4) CoA, Aging in Community:** GROWS liaison and Commissioner Mary Sweeney reported on the presentations by Frank Demarais · Deputy Director, Affordable Housing at Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs and Stephanie Moore, Resident Services Supervisor, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC). The Committee is interested in pursuing the idea of advocating for a MoCo Senior Housing Navigator due to the challenges of finding older adult affordable senior housing. They also discussed the need for more communication about the HOC housing available. The presentations uncovered the need for additional funding for

HOC vouchers with currently 2459 vouchers being used of which 30% are used by seniors. There is a large waiting list of 40,000 for vouchers.

**5) CoA, Health & Wellness** continued its discussion from last month about the presentation by Rafael Espinoza who spoke about the Montgomery County State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). This is a Medicare information system counseling program. They field about 150 calls per month and help people with Medicare decisions.

The Committee briefly discussed Home Based Services. The County provides Home and Community Based services through HHS. This is basically a service to help provide Medicaid eligibility and to help with Eligible Community Options Waiver to have assistance in the home vs nursing care. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/HomeCommBasedSvs.html>

David Engel gave an update on the Access HEARS Program and since that meeting, Access HEARS has a guest spot at the March 25<sup>th</sup> CoA meeting. There is also a presentation briefing to the AAHP in February.

**6) CoA, Public Policy Committee:** discussed the bills to be followed this General Assembly session. Morris Klein is providing a tracking email. There are over 1200 registered currently. Notable is HB0255. This bill authorizes grants provided by the MD Department of Aging to nonprofit organizations and area agencies on aging (AAAs) for aging-in-place programs to also be used to provide Older Adults the opportunity to live in a “senior village.” The bill defines “senior village” as a local, member-driven, nonprofit organization that supports community members who chose to remain living in their communities by fostering social connections through activities and events, and by coordinating volunteer help in the elder’s home using a neighbor-helping-neighbor model. Also support is behind HB 018, *Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Action – Right to Counsel*. Establishing that certain individuals have a right to legal representation in eviction proceedings. For example, a lawyer can obtain extra time for a tenant to move (reducing the risk of homelessness) or prevent an eviction from being formally entered in the court record (which increases the housing options available to the tenant). The CoA is writing a letter of support for these bills.

**7) Age Friendly H & W meeting 1/16/21** Dr. Harlivleen K Gill  
Bethesda NEWtrtion & Wellness presentation: ACL Nutrition Grant for medically tailored meals. They would be a good GROWS member.

**8) Chuck Kauffman** presented the idea to include Commission on Aging Alumni to head the CoA Communications Committee.

In December, Gloria revised the Advocacy web page to be more timeless. The monthly updates are added as links. There are links to useful documents and references.

Please check and promote the GROWS calendar for great educational and networking events. Promote the GROWS directory and website in your regular emails and correspondence.

The next GROWS Advocacy committee meets monthly on Zoom the last Tuesday of the month at 4pm.