

GROWS Advocacy Committee report: 2/23/21

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 January 28th CoA meeting:** Public Information Officer Barry Hudson was a featured speaker. He discussed cooperating more with the CoA with regards to promoting Senior issue outreach. He stated that his office provides support by placing ads in the Beacon and with Seniors Today. He would like to expand that assistance, particularly as so much information is provided virtually. Currently, his office is working on a series of virtual town hall meetings and he would like to do a town hall in the age-friendly category. Going forward, he suggests the possibilities of podcasts. Currently, the PIO staff is stressed trying to get out information on vaccines. In addition, the dedicated liaison to the CoA left about a year ago and that position was abolished. Fortunately, they will be filling a couple of positions so there will be additional staff to provide support to the CoA.

Odile Brunetto, head of DHHS A & D, reported on the \$500K reduction in budget due to the pandemic for A & D.

Patrice McGhee:

- 240-777-3000 answered 20,000 calls this past year, which is a 4% increase from the previous year.
- The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program had a 93% reduction in complaint investigations, likely because Ombudsmen are not allowed into facilities during COVID. However, the Ombudsman presence remains constant via telephone visits.
- The Senior Nutrition Program, with help from the Department of Recreation, delivered over 600,000 meals, which is an increase of 52%.

Pazit Aviv is the Villages coordinator. She spoke about how the Villages provide the strong social local network needed. There are over 20 Villages in Montgomery County and 5 more are in development. All are very different and all have done a great job during COVID.

The **February CoA meeting** is on February 25<sup>th</sup> and the featured speaker is a representative from The Greenhouse Project.

**3) The CoA Task Force** to counter social isolation and loneliness in Montgomery County (SILOS) is having its next meeting on March 3rd. SILOS has focused on: 1) life transitions, 2) broken connections, 3) website assessment tools; and 4) underserved communities. SILOS TF wishes to bring diversity to its work, to be all-inclusive, and to find those individuals who are slipping through the cracks. It recently sent surveys to senior centers in order to identify additional areas of focus.

The CoA has given the Task Force the task of planning and producing a Public Forum which will be May 18<sup>th</sup>. "Social Isolation as Affected by Health and Racial Equity" as the topic.

The TF is looking to GROWS members to provide some SLoS success stories.

**4) CoA, Aging in Community:** GROWS liaison and Commissioner Mary Sweeney reported on the presentations by Pazit Aviv, Montgomery County coordinator of the Villages network. Leslie Marks updated on the Age-Friendly Work Group on Housing.

**5) CoA, Health & Wellness** continued its discussion from last two months about the Montgomery County State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), which is run by JCA. This is a Medicare information and counseling program. They field over 100 calls per month (2029 in 2020) and help people with Medicare decisions. They advertise on buses, radio - English and Spanish, the beacon, Parish Times and a Spanish language publication. Jennifer Long talked about the 240-777-3000 number and talked about the operators and how they refer the calls to the nurses or other A & D departments.

**6) CoA, Public Policy Committee:** discussed the bills to be followed this General Assembly session. There are over 1500 registered. To see past letters: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/COA/COATestimony.html>

HB0255 is a bill that 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.”

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.

HB 910 is a bill that adds a \$750 per ear per device minimum insurance coverage for hearing aids for adults.

HB 903 requires the task force to compare practices of local Area Agencies on Aging related to the Public Guardianship program, analyze and compare other states’ public guardianship programs, examine best practices related to public guardianship programs, and make recommendations to improve Maryland’s public guardianship program.

The CoA supports SB 204, Health Care Facilities – Assisted Living Programs – Memory Care and Alzheimer’s Disease Unit Regulations, which require that the Maryland Department of Health promulgate specific standards for governing memory care and Alzheimer’s disease units in Assisted Living Programs. The Commission firmly believes that the standards enumerated in this proposed legislation are absolutely necessary to ensure quality of care for the vulnerable residents served in these programs.

SB652 requires the Maryland Department of Health, on or before April 1, 2022 develop and publish materials to assist State residents with long-term care family planning.

The CoA is writing a letter of support for these bills.

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 1pm.