

Montgomery County Commission on Child Care



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October 7, 2015

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive

Council Members
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable George Leventhal
President, Montgomery County Council

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Leventhal, Council Members and Residents:

The Montgomery County Commission on Child Care is pleased to submit its 2014-2015 Annual Report.

This has been an exciting year for child care in our community! Longstanding issues associated with delivering quality and affordable child care for all county residents moved to the front burner this year, and in some cases, became hot topics at Council Hearings, Committee meetings and within County departments that provide child care services.

In meetings with County officials, at rallies and in public forums, the Commission worked to raise awareness and jump-start conversations about the need for positive, forward thinking action on issues associated with child care that had previously stalled. The Commission supported the need to overhaul and fully fund the Working Parents Assistance (WPA) Program. We also worked aggressively to provide input on ways to improve the transparency in the processes used to provide access to child care in public space; particularly related to the bidding process for Before and After School Child Care in Elementary Schools. We also provided input that helped to shape new legislation related to establishing the position of Child Care Officer within the Department of Health and Human Services.

While not always popular, the deep commitment of this group of volunteers to raise awareness and thoughtfully advise on policy and other issues associated with early care and education was remarkable this year. Commissioners worked long hours and attended countless meetings and forums to advance the causes that matter to parents and children in Montgomery County. Commissioners are made up of a variety of stakeholders and experts in the child care and early childhood education field including: County parents, business representatives, child care providers, Montgomery County Public School staff, Montgomery College staff, and representatives from the County and State agencies that impact child care. As a group, their collective knowledge and expertise helped to influence the important conversations on how to bring about positive change for the children and families in Montgomery County.

Let's keep the momentum going.

Parents of virtually all income levels are struggling to afford child care, with more and more families at the lower end of the income spectrum left with no options other than to resort to unregulated and/or substandard care options for their children. The Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA) Workgroup provided a comprehensive outline of the actions and funding needed to improve this critical County support. Their findings require funding to increase the amount of subsidy payments and revise the income guidelines to reflect the increased cost of living in Montgomery County. Despite a difficult fiscal outlook, we need to find ways to better fund and manage the WPA program.

The process used in Montgomery County to solicit proposals and select vendors for the delivery of child care in public space must be transparent, fair and consistent across agencies. The feedback from child care providers continues to be that the processes for managing the use of public space for child care are not transparent, well-funded, or well-managed. Executive Regulation AM-III, passed with a sunset provision at the end of 2015, requires the County Council's continued scrutiny. The Commission has recommended a post audit process related to understanding the effects of the implementation of the new regulations. We urge the County Council not to miss the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and transparency of this new process before the sunset provision requires Council action.

Let's invest in the future.

Early care and education experiences are critical to ensuring that children have the foundation for school readiness and the basis for lifelong learning and success. Building a coalition of leaders across the County to focus on innovative ways to enhance and support child care professionals.

It must continue to be an immediate priority to make quality child care and early childhood education available and affordable for all children and families in Montgomery County. Money spent on child care and early childhood education is an investment in our social and economic future. Let's continue to make an immediate impact on the lives of our youngest citizens and their families.

The Commission greatly appreciates your consideration of its recommendations and priorities when making policy and budget decisions.

Sincerely,



Michelle Green
Chair, Commission on Child Care

The Commission on Child Care

Vision

Access to quality, affordable child care for all Montgomery County families.

Mission

To advise the County Executive and County Council on the development, implementation, and effectiveness of government policies, programs, and services that enhance community support for quality, affordable, and accessible child care.

Purpose

Section 27-62 of the Montgomery County Code provides authority for the Commission on Child Care to “advise the County Executive and County Council on the development of policies, programs, and services that enhance community support for high quality, affordable, and accessible child care.”

Meetings

The full Commission meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Juvenile Assessment Center, 7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 600, Rockville, MD 20855. All meetings are open to the general public.

A significant portion of the Commission’s work is accomplished through the Executive, Programmatic Issues, Public Policy, and Membership Committees. Volunteers from the general public are invited to assist the committees. Committee meetings take place on the first Wednesday of the month at 7300 Calhoun Place, with the Programmatic Issues Committee and Public Policy Committee meeting concurrently at 6:30 p.m., and the Executive Committee meeting at 7:30 p.m. All meetings are open to the public.

Please call 240-777-1019; TTY 240-777-1009 for more information regarding full Commission and Committee meetings.

Membership

The Commission has 18 voting members and five to seven non-voting members appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. Membership includes parents, center and family child care providers, and representatives from the business community, general public, and government agencies with interests in child care. The Commission is supported through staff effort from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

Commission Year 2014 - 2015 Voting Members

Parent Representatives

Sandra Cortez
Hillary Fitis
Brigid Howe
Edward Krauze
Tamieka Thomasson

Child Care Provider Representatives

Rossana Espinoza-Thorndahl
Nuri Funes
Michelle Green
Diana Holtzberger
Bernadine Occhiuzzo
Shaun Rose

Business and General Public Representatives

Rosalba Bonilla-Acosta
Linda Janulis
Barbara Warman

Maryland Municipal League Representative

Monica Sanchez

Non-Voting Members

Barbara Andrews, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Pamela Dunn, Montgomery County Planning Board
Carl Eggleston, Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care
Claudia Simmons, Montgomery County Public Schools
Vacant, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
April Kaplan, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families, Inc.

Staff

Barbara Andrews, Administrator, Early Childhood Services, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Membership

Commission Year 2015 - 2016 Voting Members

Parent Representatives

Lindsey Allard Agnamba
Ama Emanuel
Brigid Howe
Edward Krauze
Laura Seminario-Thornton

Child Care Provider Representatives

Rosalba Bonilla-Acosta
Rossana Espinoza-Thorndahl
Michelle Green
Diana Holzberger
Bernadine Occhiuzzo
Shaun Rose
Greg Smith

Business and General Public Representatives

Danielle Brown
Linda Janulis
Jian Wang
Barbara Warman
Mayme Williams

Maryland Municipal League Representative Monica Sanchez

Non-Voting Members

Barbara Andrews, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Pamela Dunn, Montgomery County Planning Board
Carl Eggleston, Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care
Claudia Simmons, Montgomery County Public Schools
Yvonne Iscandari, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Vacant, Montgomery College
April Kaplan, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families

Staff

Barbara Andrews, Administrator, Early Childhood Services, Montgomery County
Department of Health and Human Services

Recommendation#1

Ensure that the Working Parents Assistance Program supports families' access to quality child care by implementing the recommendations of the Working Parents Assistance Program Workgroup and substantially increasing funding.

The Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA) was designed in 1986 to help families obtain quality, licensed child care and support family self-sufficiency. WPA has not updated its income guidelines since 2006. With rising child care costs and the overall high cost of living in Montgomery County, the WPA subsidy amounts no longer provide a meaningful supplement for families to use to access quality child care programs that promote school readiness. Therefore, too many young children arrive at kindergarten lagging behind their peers and the County must then spend even more resources to try and catch them up—a vicious circle commonly referred to as the “achievement gap.”

Last year, a Working Parents Assistance Program Workgroup (the Workgroup), which included representatives from the Commission on Child Care, submitted two reports to the County Council (2014; Update to the 2014 Report). The first report highlighted the need for structural changes and substantial increases in funding to address the community's child care needs. Due to the County Council's concerns about the disparity that implementation of these recommendations would create between WPA and the State's Child Care Subsidy Program (CCS), the Workgroup updated recommendations to include an option for supplementing State subsidies for eligible families.

During the budget hearings, the Commission advocated for implementation of the Workgroup recommendations and advised the Council and Executive to fix the structural issues of WPA by changing the income qualification tables and award amounts, even if no additional funding could be added to the program. We were pleased that despite budget shortfalls, the WPA program received a \$550,000 increase for FY16.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will soon be implementing revised eligibility tables and updated subsidy amounts to begin fixing the structure of the WPA program. The Commission plans to monitor this implementation. DHHS is also taking the important step of establishing a Memorandum of Agreement with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to create a system for supplementing subsidies for families participating in the State CCS program who have preschool aged children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old.

The Commission will continue monitoring the program and recommends that this year the Council codify the changes to the WPA program and provide the full funding needed to support all eligible families. This investment in quality child care

will yield future savings as children enter school ready to learn and families experience increased self-sufficiency.

Recommendation #2

Create a more transparent, uniform and consistent system for Child Care in Public Space that better serves families and children and better encourages and facilitates the operation of high quality child care programs.

Child Care in Public Space (CCIPS) is administered by several different County entities, each with different missions, timelines, procedures and policies. The Commission has attempted for many years to tackle some of these public space issues. Providers and parents have felt frustrated and excluded from the process.

A County Work Group was formed to create a regulation and administrative procedures for the administration of public space by Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) of before and after school child care programs in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The Work Group included a member of the Commission and Child Care Providers, but it was focused on codifying the existing rules for just one of the County entities that deals with public space. This approach will not solve the CCIPS problem.

When the County Council Committee took up the issue of the CUPF regulation the Commission on Child Care recommended that the regulation be rejected. (November 19, 2014). The full Council convened on November 25 and voted to send the CCIPS regulation back to the County Executive to add a one year sunset provision. The Council passed the revised Regulation with the sunset provision on Tuesday, December 2, 2014.

The Executive Regulation regarding the bid processes in MCPS locations, and which sunsets at the end of 2015, does not seem to have improved the CCIPS problem. Providers raised concerns this year that some had multiple sites go up for rebid at the same time while others, who have been in their public space for much longer periods of time, had no sites go up for rebid. CUPF has not been transparent about how it is selecting providers for rebid and has not published a list of when all sites will be scheduled for rebid. CUPF, DHHS, and MCPS continue to have different processes and procedures with varying levels of satisfaction among parents and providers. This past year, well over half of the CUPF providers who went up for rebid lost their spaces. There were at least two appeals of the rebid decisions but they were denied.

Now that the CUPF regulation is due to sunset in December 2015, the Commission on Child Care recommends that the County Council:

- 1) **Allow the regulation to sunset so that a more responsive regulation that supports children and families and a more transparent process can be developed. Perform a post-audit of the implementation of the CUPF regulation. Suspend CUPF rebids during this process.**
- 2) **Consolidate oversight of Child Care in Public Space under DHHS, a department that includes the expertise in child care needed to provide a process that is focused on the quality of child care programs in public space**
- 3) **At a minimum, require CUPF, DHHS and MCPS to create, publish and maintain a comprehensive list of when child care sites in schools were awarded and when they are scheduled to be rebid to provide for more transparency to the child care community**

Commission Activities 2014-2015

Guest Speakers, Presentations and Collaborations with Other Groups:

- The Programmatic Issues Committee met with Natasha Ramberg, Manager of the Infants and Toddlers Program (MCITP), Early Childhood Services, DHHS and Amy Cropp, Supervisor PEP, Infants and Toddlers and Special Education Programs, MCPS on mental health services for young children available through the MCITP Program. (October 8, 2014)
- The Public Policy Committee met with Debbie Moore, Senior Policy Analyst of Maryland Family Network (MFN), who discussed “Advocacy 101” and also provided an overview of the State Child Care Subsidy Program and how to best advocate for improvements to the Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA). (October 8, 2014)
- The full Commission met with Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and discussed DHHS and Commission priorities. (November 19, 2014)
- The Programmatic Issues Committee met with Portia Willis, Program Manager, Early Childhood Mental Health, Early Childhood Services, DHHS, to understand mental health services for young children in licensed child care centers. (December 3, 2014)
- The full Commission met with Councilmembers Navarro and Riemer regarding proposed child care bills. (February, 17, 2015)
- The full Commission met with JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Families Services, DHHS regarding child care bills proposed by the County Council. (March 18, 2015)
- The full Commission met with Councilmember Elrich regarding Councilmembers Riemer and Navarro’s proposed child care bill for an Office of Child Care and regarding issues related to Child Care in Public Space. (April 1, 2015)
- Several additional sessions of the full Commission meetings were held in 2015 to discuss issues being discussed at the County Council.

Testimony and Correspondence:

- Transmitted a letter to County Executive Leggett and Council President Craig Rice on Child Care and Public Space and recommendations regarding CUPF regulation. (September 19, 2014)
- Presented Commission budget priorities at the HHS Community Budget Forum. (October 20, 2014)
- Attended all Boards, Committees and Commissions Quarterly Leadership Meetings with Uma Ahluwalia, Director, HHS for 2014-2015.
- Attended and provided comments at the Annual B/C/C meeting with the County Executive. (February 2, 2015)
- Transmitted a letter to Council President Leventhal on the Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA) recommending the implementation of the WPA Workgroup Recommendations (February 11, 2015)
- Transmitted a letter to Council president Leventhal recommending the passage of Council Bill 3-15 (March 23, 2015)
- Provided Testimony at a public hearing in support of Council Bill 13-15 (March 31, 2015)
- Provided budget testimony to the County Executive on the proposed FY16 operating budget for the County (April 15, 2015)
- Transmitted a letter to the County Council joint HHS/ED Committee on proposed changes to proposed Bills 11-15 and 13-15 with Commission recommendations (April 16, 2015)

Other Noteworthy Activities:

- Participated in the Child Care in Public Space Workgroup for the purpose of developing administrative procedures for the Montgomery County Executive Regulation on Before and After School Childcare Programs in Public Schools and aligning the child care in public space system.
- Participated in the Montgomery County Early Childhood Advisory Council and provided input on the development of a strong early childhood community in Montgomery County and an early childhood comprehensive plan.

Priorities 2015-2016

- 1) Ensure that the Working Parents Assistance Program supports families' access to quality child care by implementing the recommendations of the Working Parents Assistance Program Workgroup and substantially increasing funding.
- 2) Engage with the Council and Executive on Child Care in Public Space as the CUPF regulation is scheduled to sunset at the end of 2015. Work to create a more transparent and consistent system that better serves families and children and better encourages and facilitates the operation of high quality programs by providers.
- 3) Monitor the implementation of Bill 13-15 as well as the Children's Opportunity Fund to ensure that the Commission and child care & early education professionals are represented.
- 4) Explore the full cost of investing in quality child care, the economic benefit of investing and potential funding available through the newly designated entities to support economic development and workforce development in Montgomery County (Economic Development Corporation and WorkSource Montgomery, Inc.) as well as leaders of the new Children's Opportunity Fund.

Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director
JoAnn Barnes, Chief
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Children, Youth and Family Services
Commission on Child Care
7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 700
Rockville, Maryland 20855
240-777-1019 Voice, 240-777-1009 TTY, 240-777-1153 FAX

Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request. For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission or access to its programs or services.

