

**Annual Report
Commission on Aging
2023**

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the COA is to advise and assist in the content, administration, and financing of county programs designed to serve the elderly residents of the county; to work with the community to develop awareness and understanding of problems and concerns of the elderly and to provide the Commissioners of St. Mary's County advice and assistance concerning county programs and resources offered for senior residents (50 years and older) of St. Mary's County.

II. MEMBERSHIP

The Commission on Aging (COA) began the calendar year with 3 new members, followed by 2 new members mid-year. Our new members brought new perspectives and ideas to our meetings. Members for 2023 are: Janet (JJ) Perryman, Chair; Carolyn Guy, Vice Chair; Nicola Barr, Secretary; Omonigho Olumese; Thomas Ridley; Christine Morgan; Rowena Bossio; Catherine Coates; Kathryn Kennedy; Barbara O'Neal; Kimberly Quade; and Jean-Marie Hansen.

III. 2023 COA ACTIVITIES

Meetings are held the fourth Monday of the month at 1:00 p.m. at the Garvey Senior Activity Center. We welcome any opportunity to share with you, in more detail, our efforts and invite you and/or others to attend our meetings.

A. Senior Legislation – With the help of Mr. John Houser, Deputy County Attorney, Ms. Rowena Bossio of the COA reviewed legislation that affected our senior community. These bills were summarized during the COA meetings. A total of 21 bills were forwarded to the Commissioners for support.

B. Outreach – The COA focus for 2023 was to raise awareness of existing services provided by the County. Discussions on topics such as what information to provide at the outreach events; what venues; who would provide the information; etc. were discussed at several of our meetings. It was determined that we would do outreach events at the Senior Activity Centers. Our outreach events started in August as a “beta” event to

determine what worked and what didn't work. Between August and December, we conducted nine outreach events between the three senior activity centers.

C. Tri-County Meetings: The Chairs of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties COAs have continued to meet quarterly to discuss what is going on in each county. In 2023, the meetings were expanded to include the Vice Chairs. During these meetings, each county provided updates on their COAs as well as discussed challenges and concerns.

D. Senior Transportation – In 2023, one of the members of the COA continued to also serve as a member of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to enhance the sharing of information between the COA and TAC. Based on a recommendation by the COA, the TAC agreed, during their April 21, 2022 meeting, that a survey should be conducted to identify specific ridership issues and concerns of St. Mary's Transit System (STS). Throughout the remainder of 2022 and into 2023, two members from the COA worked on the TAC Subcommittee to create the survey questions, distribute the survey, and analyze the results. The survey was conducted from 10 Feb – 7 Apr 2023. The results of the survey were briefed to the TAC on 20 July 2023. Analysis of the survey results showed there was a need for increased communication regarding available types of STS service and a need for improved presentation of information about fares, schedules, routes, and bus stop locations. A couple of the recommendations for the way forward were to improve STS website information for increased clarity and ease of usage and increase outreach to the community regarding transportation services.

E. Guest Speakers: During this past year numerous guest speakers attended our meetings to provide insights into the many services offered to the seniors of our county. Highlights include:

- Ms. Monika Williams, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) Program Manager, Department of Aging & Human Services, provided an overview of the various volunteer assignments with local county agencies, non-profits, and other volunteer stations.
- Ms. Sarah Miller, Community Programs and Outreach Manager, Department of Aging & Human Services, provided an overview of the

programs and services offered such as communicating information to the senior community through the bi-monthly newsletter, website updates, Facebook, outreach events, and local media. This Division is also responsible for the planning and implementation of the Department of Aging & Human Services signature events, including Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, the Community Health and Wellness Fair, Veterans Resource Day and Keys to Senior Independence, to name a few.

- Jennifer Bruckler, Cedar Lane Senior Living Facility, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, provided information about the facility and residency. She also discussed the new “Life in Balance” wellness program offered to seniors with incomes of 80% area median or below.
- Ms. Brandy Tulley, Deputy Director, Department of Aging & Human Services, provided information about the Senior Activity Centers and the special programs offered by the centers. In addition, home-delivered meals, fitness classes, congregate meals, and senior activity center goals, were discussed.
- Ms. Sasha Seenath, Director, Three Oaks Center, provided issues and concerns with regards to homelessness and the Three Oaks Center.
- Lori-Jennings-Harris, Director, Department of Aging & Human Services, spoke twice, once to provide an overview of her department and the second time to provide a summary of the 2024-2027 Comprehensive Plan of Services and Senior Agenda. Summary provided included the topics within the document and a brief overview of the Senior Agenda.
- Mr. Shawn Kingston, and Roy Alvey, St. Mary’s County Housing Authority, provided information on the role and purpose of the Housing Authority. Additional discussion was about the potential for new senior housing at Green Space.
- Ms. Allison Swint and Terry Kerns, St. Mary’s Public Works and Transportation, provided information on the various transportation programs as well as updates on the bus stop signage.

IV. SUCCESSES

- A. **Outreach:** Between August and December, we held 9 outreach events going to the three different senior activity centers. In total, we spoke with over 160 people and provided brochures and take-aways with information on the existing services provided by our county.
- B. **Budget:** During the summer of 2023, a budget of \$3,000 was approved for the COA. This budget allowed the COA to provide take-aways with important information about senior services as well as the File of Life medical information cards that, when completed, contain vital information to first responders.
- C. **Update of Resources in Dept. of Aging & Human Services Resource Guide:** A thorough research was conducted of available services and documents that include service information. Afterwards, the Dept. of Aging & Human Services Resource Guide was reviewed and recommendations of additional resources were provided to be included.
- D. **Transportation:** The COA continued to work closely with Public Works and Transportation to address issues and clarify policies. Two members of the COA met with members of Public Works and Transportation in October after hearing about some issues from several seniors at an outreach event. Afterwards, the COA provided clarification of the different programs, e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Specialized Statewide Transportation Assistance Program (SSTAP), to the seniors which helped with setting expectations of what is and is not included in the services. Additionally, in November, the COA partnered with STS representatives and provided a presentation and Q&A session at the Loffler Senior Activity Center. This increase in communication has gone a long way for good will between the seniors and STS.
- E. **Updated COA brochure:** The COA brochure was updated with a new logo, information concerning the COA, our mission and focus, when we meet and how to join. This brochure is provided at our outreach events.

- F. **Partnership with Cedar Lane for Communicating the Life in Balance Program:** The COA assisted Cedar Lane by providing brochures and information about their new Life in Balance Program at our outreach events.

V. CHALLENGES

A. **Hybrid Meetings:**

1. **Background:** Microsoft Teams is used for those who cannot meet in-person at the Garvey Senior Activity Center.
2. **Challenge:** This is a very useful tool when everyone is using the conference tool; however, with only one computer in the Garvey conference room, it is difficult for those on-line to hear what is being discussed or see the people speaking. Additionally, a separate phone line is not provided for those who just want to call in.

B. **Inability to update COA By-Laws:**

1. **Background:** COA by-laws provided are Rev. 6.21.11.
 - Article II, Purpose, states: The purpose of the Body is to provide the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County with advice and assistance concerning the administration and financing of county programs designed for the elderly residents of St. Mary's (including adult day-care), the operations and general performance of the St. Mary's County Office on Aging (currently called the Dept. of Aging and Human Services), the achievement of goals set for the elderly population and how best to work with the community in developing awareness and understanding of problems and concerns of the elderly population (hereinafter "the Public Activity").
 - Article III, Functions of the Body, states: To accomplish its purpose, the Body shall meet regularly, consider, and advise on the following related to the Public Activity:
 1. Any duty or responsibility assigned to the Body by statute, public local law or ordinance;
 2. Program operations;
 3. Policies, procedures and potential areas of improvement;

4. Identification of needed improvements, safety issues, and capital projects regarding any physical facilities;
 5. Adherence to current Federal, State and Local regulations and standards;
 6. Use and implementation of quality control measures;
 7. Operating expenses and revenues;
 8. Public education; and
 9. Identification of needs and the best interests of the citizens of St. Mary's County.
- Resolution 2019-02 states for the purpose: The Commission shall advise the Commissioners of St. Mary's County on matters related to the elderly population and assist in the content, administration and financing of county programs designed to serve the elderly residents of the County.
2. **Challenge:** Each year our new members read the by-laws, specifically Article III, Functions of the Body. Each year our new members want to ensure that they adhere to Article III. While some members may have the background or experience to assist with some of the items listed in Article III, in general, as a body, we do not have the wherewithal to fulfill those duties. To avoid confusion, it would be better if the bylaws eliminated Article III, Functions of the Body, and just keep Article II, Purpose. When we asked if we could update the COA By-Laws, we were told that the bylaws for most of the commissions in St. Mary's are the same and that we couldn't change it.

C. Unable to vet applications.

1. **Background:** The Officers of the Commission on Aging in Calvert County are allowed to review applications for their Commission. This review is done to try to ensure that most districts are represented in their COA as well as to try to ensure diversity.
2. **Challenge:** When asked if the Officers of the COA could review applications for the COA, we were told that we could not. When we get new members, we do not know how they have been vetted. We do not know if they are filling a void in a district that is not represented. We currently have only one male member who will not continue in 2024.

D. Open Meetings Act:

- 1. Background:** In general, the interpretation provided to the COA was that subcommittees (or a sub-group of the COA) cannot meet to research and discuss recommendations on focus areas without having an agenda and advising the public of a meeting. We have met with the County Attorney to discuss this issue in hope of finding a way to help the seniors in our community while still adhering to the Act.
- 2. Challenge:** The Open Meetings Act restricts our members from doing any work outside of regularly scheduled meetings even though no decision will be made until the scheduled COA meeting. This has impeded our ability to make meaningful progress on issues in between our monthly meetings.

E. Lack of Any Feedback and Response from the Commissioners

- 1. Background:** In July 2022 a presentation was provided on the results of a survey completed in 2021. The survey was conducted to help the COA determine where to focus our efforts. The presentation included the results of the survey as well as a summary of various focus areas, the issues and where the COA would focus and recommendations. At the end of the presentation was a page titled “Request for Commissioners”. Additionally, in March 2023, a letter was sent to the Commissioners requesting support for our recommendations (based on two surveys) that the STS website be improved to be more user friendly.
- 2. Challenge:** To date, we have not received a response from the Commissioners. How can we, as the Commission on Aging, feel that we can fulfill our purpose and make a difference in the community if our Commissioners do not provide any acknowledgement of receipt, feedback or response to the COA?

VI. PLANS FOR 2024

- A. Outreach:** The COA will continue to focus on Outreach and provide information on available services in the county.

- B. Hosting the Tri-County Meeting:** The St. Mary's COA will host the next Tri-County meeting on June 6, 2024. It has been agreed that each COA will provide an update on what each county is doing as it pertains to their senior residents. Commissioner Guy has also agreed to participate in the Tri-County meeting and we have reached out to the Maryland Dept. of Aging for a keynote speaker from the Office of the Secretary of Aging.
- C. Housing Authority:** A couple of members from the COA will meet with a couple of members of the Housing Authority (ensuring that the Open Meetings Act is not violated) to discuss needs of the County and to discuss ways in which the COA can support.
- D. Public Transportation:** The STS program understands the importance of communication and providing expectations to their ridership. The COA will continue to work with STS to support outreach events with STS.
- E. Support for the Senior Agenda:** Resolution to adopt the Senior Agenda was signed February 25, 2014. None of the current County Commissioners are signatories to this resolution. The COA intends to seek direction from the Commissioners concerning the focus and support of the Senior Agenda.
- F. Increase Collaboration with the Department of Aging & Human Services:** The COA hopes for an increase in communication and collaboration with the Dept. of Aging & Human Services so that we can be more proactive in assisting them when applicable topics/initiatives and in understanding any issues that they have so that we can determine how we may support. Additionally, it is requested that the COA be able to provide their own input into any update of the Advisory Council section of the Comprehensive Plan of Services FY 2024 – 2027 or any other document that references the COA.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The COA wishes to thank Mr. John Houser, Deputy County Attorney, for providing us guidance and information concerning 2023 legislation that affected seniors; Ms. Lori Jennings-Harris and her staff at the DAHS for providing a wealth of information and support; and Ms. Mercedes Jones, Senior Administrative Coordinator, for her superb support and assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet (JJ) Perryman
Chair, St. Mary's County Commission on Aging