

**Annual Report  
Commission on Aging  
2022**

## **2022 ANNUAL REPORT COMMISSION ON AGING (COA)**

### **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.

### **Membership**

Carolyn Guy, Chair; Janet Perryman, Vice Chair; Catherine Buckler, Secretary; Gail Murdock; Omonigho Olumese; Walter Boswell; Virginia Morris; Thomas Ridley; Christine Morgan; Janet Newman; Marie Bennett; and Rowena Bossio.

### **Updates and Challenges**

The Commission on Aging (COA) began the calendar year with 5 new members who were all optimistic and ready to work. Throughout 2022 the COA continued to meet in a hybrid fashion (both in-person and via phone conference tools). At mid-year, we changed our meeting venue from the Old Garvey Center to the New Garvey Center. This change helped attract some members of the public to attend our meetings. These visitors provided the COA with fresh insights into the concerns of the community we serve.

COA Email Address: The COA has an easy to remember county issued email address—[commissiononaging@stmarysmd.com](mailto:commissiononaging@stmarysmd.com). This e-mail address will be used on announcements, brochures, newsletters, etc. It will help to encourage contact from interested public about the programs, activities, concerns and issues for our senior population.

We continue to have some challenges. We started the year with 12 members, but ended the year with only 6 members. The reduction in membership was caused by members' work challenges (we meet during the day), illnesses; or relocation from the County. We advertised for new members in November and are hoping to find new members to join our board in 2023. Additionally, the Open Meetings Act restricts our members from doing any work outside of our regularly scheduled

meetings. We have met with the County Attorney to discuss this issue in the hopes of finding a way to help the seniors in our community while still adhering to the Act.

## **2022 COA Activities**

Guest Speakers: Throughout 2022, the COA met on the fourth Monday of every month (with the exception of December). Each meeting is advertised and open for the general public to dial-in or to attend in person. 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. Hannah Simmerman, Program Coordinator for the Department of Health, provided COVID-19 updates to include current infection rate data; isolation and quarantine information; vaccination rates and information; and the latest masking and testing data.
- Ms. Sarah Miller, Community Programs and Outreach Manager, Department of Aging & Human Services, provided an overview of the programs and services offered by the Department. The Community Programs and Outreach Division is responsible for communicating information to the senior community through the bi-monthly newsletter, website updates, Facebook, 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.
- Ms. Brandy Tulley, Senior Center Operations Division Manager, 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 center goals, were discussed.
- Mr. Sam Brown, President of A Community That Shares (ACTS) provided information about the organization which provides in-home medical equipment, at no charge, to residents of Southern Maryland.

- Ms. Debbie Barker, Senior Information & Assistance Manager, Department of Aging & Human Services, presented information regarding her division that offers information in the areas of housing, Social Security, benefits programs, transportation (Senior Rides), legal assistance, State Health Insurance Assistance Program, Senior Medicare Patrol and other community programs. She provided an overview of the State Health Insurance Program (SHIP), Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), and the types of programs and services available through Senior Information & Assistance, and the Senior Rides Program.
- Ms. Michelle Cariaso, the Director of the Charlotte Hall Veteran's Home, provided an informational brief about the Veteran's Home. Ms. Cariaso provided an overview of the admission requirements, activities offered at the home, and challenges the facility has faced since COVID. Ms. Cariaso detailed the hiring challenges they are facing and the isolation the residents of the nursing home have experienced since COVID began. She stressed that she is always looking for volunteers to come spend time with the residents.
- Mr. Neil Murphy, Deputy County Attorney answered questions regarding the current COA By-Laws.
- Ms. Cynthia Brown, Human Services Division Manager, Department of Aging & Human Services, presented. The division helps coordinate and support an array of programs and services for adults, families and children. The Human Services Division coordinates homelessness prevention efforts, Teen Court, Local Management Board, Christmas Caring, and is a partner agency with Project Graduation and WARM.
- Dr. Sudha Haley spoke about AARP Maryland's Age Friendly Communities. The COA has learned that Calvert County has been working to be designated as an "Age Friendly Community" and is very interested in researching how to pursue this initiative for St. Mary's County.
- Mr. John Houser, County Attorney, provided us with a comprehensive explanation of the Maryland legislative process and also answered questions board members had regarding the Open Meetings Act. As mentioned previously this legislation continues to introduce challenges for

the COA by restricting us from working with each other on any COA issues outside of our regularly scheduled meetings.

Focus Areas: During 2022, the COA divided their efforts into six focus areas based on the feedback received from our 2021 survey results. The results of our discussions are listed below:

- Senior Housing - The Housing Committee focused on reaching out Senior Living Housing Facilities in St. Mary's County to capture information on availability, cost, etc. They were also in touch with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Aging & Human Services to learn about the latest information on affordable housing. They informed us that the Holiday Inn in Solomons is converting to a Senior Living Facility and that Three Oaks is in need of shelters for homeless, elderly seniors and veterans. As is no surprise, affordable housing is a challenge for all. Ms. Christine Morgan has volunteered to sit in on Housing Authority meetings (which occur on the third Wednesday of each month) to get more information. Additionally, Ms. Morgan is looking into the viability of the ability to “pair” elderly people in need of housing with elderly people who would like a roommate.
- Senior Transportation – Ms. Janet Perryman and Ms. Rowena Bossio met with the Department of Public Works and Transportation and received information about the price change for the bus route to and from the Senior Centers. The results of our COA survey showed that 18 seniors out of the 277 respondents use St. Mary’s public transportation. The committee looked at the Transportation website and feel that it is not user-friendly. As a result, the members of the COA reviewed the Department of Transportation website from a user point-of-view and offered recommendations on how to make the St. Mary's Transit System more user-friendly. Comments and recommendations concerning the improvement for the STS website were sent to the Department of Public Works and Transportation on April 27th. To date, no updates to the website have been completed. Additionally, in a PowerPoint brief to the Commissioners, July 2022, it was requested that they follow up with Public Works and Transportation on updating the STS website.

The committee members attended the Commission on Transportation meeting. Discussions included creating a survey concerning ridership for STS and increased collaboration between the two commissions to increase

- awareness of plans concerning transportation as they affect our senior community. They also provided information about the Wheels for Wellness program which provides transportation for seniors to medical appointments. The committee members now regularly attend the Transportation Advisory Committee meetings and provide quarterly feedback to the COA.
- Senior Legislation – Ms. Rowena Bossio and Mr. Thomas Ridley reviewed the current proposed legislation with local veteran fraternities for their input for the upcoming 2023 Legislative Cycle. As a result, the COA sent 16 Letters of Support to the County Attorney regarding 16 proposed bills affecting St. Mary’s County Seniors. The County Attorney will review our letters and will forward them when and if appropriate.
  - Veteran's Issues – Mr. Thomas Ridley attended the 2022 Military & Veteran Cultural Diversity Symposium and provided a brief synopsis to the members. In addition, he visited the Charlotte Hall Veteran's Home and arranged for their Director to present an informational briefing. He also met with the St. Mary’s Recreation and Parks Director on behalf of the Maryland Charlotte Hall Veterans Home regarding the connection of the MVA Home Trail to the Three Notch Road Trail. Successful facilitation of information and data resulted in a concurrence from the Recreation and Parks Director was received, and will be added to the county’s 2024 project list. He also attended a Calvert County Veterans Affairs Commission meeting to gain insight into their purpose and origins with the intent of soliciting interest from local veteran fraternity groups in establishing a like commission in St. Mary’s County. He has briefly socialized this idea with two local fraternities to assess interest. Currently, the following counties have local veteran commissions – Calvert, Arundel, Prince George’s, Charles, Montgomery, Harford. St. Mary’s County is a member of a tri-county commission with the Calvert and Charles counties.
  - Technology - Catherine Buckler and Janet Newman established a partnership with St. Mary's County Library to offer technology education to seniors at St. Mary's County Libraries. Throughout 2022 they provided class information for seniors.
  - Outreach – The COA continually looks for ways to reach out to our local seniors. We advertise each of our monthly meetings by distributing flyers to the local libraries and to the local post offices. We also place a monthly announcement in the Senior Centers e-Newsletter. As stated previously, we

also changed our meeting venue to the New Garvey Senior Center and are happy to announce we have had some seniors in attendance. We feel strongly that interacting with our senior community is the way we can best serve them in the future.

Tri-County Meetings: The chairs of Calvert County, Charles County, and St. Mary's County COAs continue to meet on a quarterly basis to share information on important topics common to the three counties. These topics include affordable housing, transportation challenges, and ways to help seniors age in place.

The Charles County COA will host the next Tri-County meeting in June 2023.

COA Survey: The COA continues its outreach to keep the community informed of new and ongoing issues concerning seniors. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, members had limited interaction with the public during 2021. In order to reach the citizens we serve and help us plan on how to meet the needs of our senior residents, the COA conducted a survey to gather information on the needs of our senior population. The members developed the survey and advertised it from mid-October through December 1, 2021. We received many responses – 295 overall.

The COA reviewed the results from the survey and produced a hard-copy briefing they provided to the County Commissioners in July.

### **Plans for 2023**

The COA will continue to work on 5 main focus areas: Senior Housing, Senior Transportation, Senior Legislation, Veteran Issues, and Outreach. While each is extremely important, our main focus will be on Outreach to our Local Seniors. The inputs are vital to helping us identify their issues and/or concerns and develop recommended courses of action.

### **Ongoing Activities**

The members of the COA, proudly and willingly, help individually in other community areas. Some are: Homeless Prevention Board, RSVP, National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE); and the Lion's Club.

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

### **Acknowledgement**

The Commission on Aging wishes to thank Ms. Lori Jennings-Harris and her staff at the DAHS for providing a wealth of information and support. Thanks also go to Ms. Mercedes Jones, Senior Administrative Coordinator, for her superb support and assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Guy  
Chair, St. Mary's County Commission on Aging