

Maryland Commission on Aging
Maryland Department of Aging
301 West Preston Street Suite 1007, Baltimore, MD 21201
November 18, 2015
Minutes

Members Present: Stuart Rosenthal--Chair, Sharonlee Vogel--Vice-Chair, Hon. Jordan Harding, Maria Jimenez, Rose Maria Li, Louise Lynch, Michael McPherson, Dot Principe, Chandhok (Jesse) Singh, Mary Ellen Thomsen

Members Absent: Sandie Callis, Hon. Barbara Frush

Staff Present: Rona E. Kramer, Secretary of Aging; Rosanne B. Hanratty, Staff to the Commission

Guests: Michael Sanderson, Executive Director Maryland Association of Counties, and Robin Clark Eilenberg, Esq., Policy Analyst, Maryland Association of Counties (MACO)

Greetings and Introductions: Mr. Rosenthal greeted members, staff and guests. He welcomed new Commission member Mary Ellen Thomsen and invited all those present to introduce themselves, describe their backgrounds and how they have and expect to contribute to the Commission's work.

Secretary's Remarks: Secretary Kramer informed the Commission that Governor Hogan's treatment for cancer has been successful and that his health is excellent.

She informed the Commission that she was faced with significant fiscal challenges when assumed her position; while only half-way through the state fiscal year, MDoA had spent three-quarters of its administrative budget. In order to correct this situation travel and other expenses have been curtailed and thirty percent of the agency's positions remain unfilled. Secretary Kramer said that a new fiscal officer has been hired and that going forward MDoA will function in a fiscally responsible manner. She also noted that federal reimbursement for the services of Maryland Access Point (MAP) is now based on the number of calls and time spent on reimbursable activities rather than by grants.

Secretary Kramer outlined the priority that she assigns to services designed to maintaining the health and optimal functioning of older adults. She cited as one example the Living Well center on the Eastern Shore. She noted that, while the population of older adults is burgeoning, funding for services has been, and will remain, flat. Both for the benefit of older adults themselves and in light of funding realities, she said that much more emphasis should be given to maintaining the health of adults as they age. She cited as one example the new hospital reimbursement method for Maryland hospitals which relies on a global fee that provides

incentive to health systems to engage in efforts to promote the health of the population and to provide incentives against repeated hospitalizations and re-hospitalization. She said that MDoA is examining the feasibility of having a person on the Department staff charged with interfacing with the health care system to encourage efforts to promote healthy aging and discouraging readmissions to hospitals.

Secretary Kramer outlined several other activities at MDoA. These include the “My Groceries to Go” program designed to assist food-insecure older adults; Caregiver month which was celebrated in October; and Medicare open-enrollment assistance provided to older adults through MDoA and the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). In response to questions from Commission members, Secretary Kramer explained that each AAA has a State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) coordinator and advertises for volunteers to assist with Medicare open-enrollment and ongoing Medicare questions. In addition, MDoA has staff dedicated to coordinating SHIP efforts across the state and has used federal monies to advertise SHIP services and has used federal monies to advertise open-enrollment and SHIP services. In addition two phone-a-thons were held to publicize Medicare’s open enrollment period—one in the Baltimore and one in the Washington DC market—in which state, local and federal partners participated.

In response to Commission members’ questions, Secretary Kramer said that FY 2016 cuts had come almost exclusively from administrative expenses and that only \$100,000 in program cuts were made. Also in response to questions, she said that MDoA partners with not-for-profits, for example with the Maryland Foodbank for the My Groceries to Go program; and that pilot programs, such as My Groceries to Go, were designed to be scaled up as participation levels required under federal grant guidelines increase. She noted that it is necessary to prove the viability of MDoA efforts to federal and other funding partners in order for programs, such as My Groceries to Go, to be expanded.

Presentation by MACO Representatives: Mr. Sanderson stated that his goal for the meeting was both to outline MACO’s roles and activities and to engage in a conversation with Commission members on shared goals of enhancing the quality of life and providing optimal services to older adults. He said that MACO is the trade organization of county government in Maryland. He noted that, while local services may be shaped by federal and state law, counties deliver the greatest portion of services to MD residents, including health and human services.

He said that MACO serves several functions: to facilitate networking among county government leaders; to enhance the policy and administrative knowledge base of county leadership; and to advocate for counties in fiscal and policy deliberations at the state level. To these ends, MACO sponsors a “Day of Excellence” for newly elected county leadership and sponsors statewide conferences to foster communication and that include presentations and discussions of key issues, such as providing optimal services to older adults. MACO partners with N4A (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging) in doing so. He noted that MDoA staff had participated in MACO conferences. For example, Teja Rau, MDoA Chief Long Term Services and Supports, made a presentation on the new reimbursement model for MAP services.

Mr. Sanderson identified county leadership interests in enhancing the ability of residents to age in place, promoting public safety and emergency preparedness, and facilitating efforts to promote healthy aging.

Commissioners described the joint activities such as annual training held for state and local commissions. They also noted the expressed perception by some local leaders in aging services that some County executives were not fully engaged in addressing issues affecting the present and future needs of older adults or interfacing with leadership of the local community and commissions on aging. Mr. Sanderson described what he termed the “tyranny of the immediate,” which he said describes the dilemma of government leadership to address present fiscal and service realities, to the detriment of planning for the longer term. This includes planning for issues such as the changing age demographics of the population and the need to develop strategies to address these. He said that he is hopeful that the crisis environment, engendered by the effects of the 2008 economic crisis, may be abating so that longer-term policy goals may be analyzed, developed and debated.

Ms. Lynch observed that partnership-building is key to facilitating optimal planning and services at the county and state level. She cited as an example the challenges faced by county leadership in addressing the varying transportation needs, especially those of older adults, across the state. She also noted the key role of county investment in efforts to maintain the health and functioning of seniors.

Mr. Sanderson said that MACO engages in legislative advocacy to address such issues. Mr. Rosenthal explained that, while the State Commission advises the Secretary of Aging and is precluded from lobbying as a body, State Commissioners may advocate and lobby individually. He also said that local commissions may not face the same restrictions on lobbying and that in the past the State Commission had sponsored advocacy training for local commissioners.

Mr. Sanderson stated that MACO would welcome information-sharing with the Commission and the participation of individual Commissioners in activities such as panel membership in MACO’s upcoming August conference.

Discussion: Secretary Kramer was invited to provide the Commission with a presentation on the FY 2017 budget. She explained that it has not yet been approved by the Governor so that it cannot be discussed in detail but that she expects the budgetary development process to be similar to that of FY 2016. In response to Mr. Rosenthal’s request, she said that the MDoA legislative liaison could provide periodic updates to the Commission and that no positions had yet been taken by the Department on any legislative proposals.

She said that she would invite her brother, State Assemblyman Ben Kramer, to discuss his efforts, including legislative proposals, to enhance state services to Maryland older adults at the December Commission meeting.

Commissioners discussed the feasibility of inviting members of local commissions to address State Commission meetings on a rotating basis. In addition, it was noted that a presentation on long term care insurance which the Commission had requested would be deferred to accommodate Assemblyman Kramer's visit in December.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at noon.

Minutes submitted by Rosanne B. Hanratty