

Maryland Commission on Aging
North Laurel Community Center, Laurel, Maryland
December 14, 2016
10:00 AM—12:30 PM
Minutes

Members Present: Rose Maria Li, Chair; Sharonlee Vogel, Vice-Chair; Joy Hatchette; Helen Kimble; George Rebok; Carmel Roques; Mary Ellen Thomsen

Members Absent: Hon. Barbara Frush; Hon. Jordan Harding; Dot Principe

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

Greetings and Updates--Rose Maria Li, Chair:

Dr. Li greeted attendees. She informed the Commission that John Haaga, Ph. D., Chief of the Division of Behavioral and Social Research at the National Institute on Aging has been appointed to the Commission by Governor Larry Hogan.

Dr. Rebok said that Mayor Harding had been unable to attend the meeting because of illness and Commission members requested Dr. Rebok to convey their best wishes for a speedy recovery to Mayor Harding.

Winter Weather Closings:

If the Howard County Schools have a delayed opening or are closed on a day on which the Commission is to meet, the Commission meeting will be canceled.

Secretary's Remarks—Rona E. Kramer, Secretary of Aging:

Secretary Kramer updated Commissioners on the status of the State's budget. She said that the administration is working diligently to balance the budget but that, while revenues have risen, they are not keeping pace with spending. She distributed a graph (appended) illustrating the trend. Secretary Kramer also stated that Governor Hogan is making every effort to bring revenues and spending into alignment but that this effort is made more difficult by the level of mandated spending in the Maryland State budget and the required repayment of the State's capital debts.

With regard to the MDoA budget, Secretary Kramer said the Department has been cautious in its spending and that its budget submission was conservative and that MDoA spending cuts were made through decreases in the administrative budget, not from any program budget. She noted the challenge, facing MDoA and the State as a whole, of the increased numbers of older adults to be served, while the amount of public funding available for serving older adults has remained relatively flat. As well, she informed the Commission of the improved fiscal

management of the Department, including clearer segmentation of administrative and program budgets. She said that MDoA reverted \$1.5 million to the State general fund.

Ms. Roques asked if the MDoA infrastructure was sufficient to meet the Department's needs and Secretary Kramer stated that MDoA is in the process of filling vacant positions but that successful restructuring is time intensive.

Secretary Kramer also noted that use of innovation is key to meeting the challenges of fulfilling serving Maryland's aging population. For example, she discussed programs to facilitate reuse of durable medical equipment once the original user no longer needs the equipment. Howard County's Area Agency on Aging (AAA) has such a program in which durable medical equipment that is no longer needed by an individual is donated to the program and is distributed, at no cost, to others who have a need. Often such equipment has been paid for from public funds, which are not recouped when the equipment is no longer needed. Secretary Kramer said that Israel has a nationwide program of this type. She said that working with not-for-profit organizations is also important, such as MDoA's work with Associated Jewish Charities.

Secretary Kramer also noted that three new cabinet Secretaries had been named and that she is pleased with the evolving nature of the Commission's membership, which taps into needed skills for the Commission's work.

Approval of November 9, 2016 Minutes:

The November 9, 2016 minutes were approved without changes.

Background on, and Evaluation of, the Baltimore-based *Experience Corps* program and Update on Volunteer-based Research Projects in Development—George Rebok:

Dr. Li said that Dr. Rebok's presentation was one aspect of the Commission's fulfilling its two-pronged statutory charge: to review ongoing statewide programs for older adults and to review new statewide programs for older adults. She stated that Dr. Rebok's presentation on *Experience Corps* would be followed, at the February Commission meeting, by presentations on two other projects—*Capable* and *MIND at HOME*. She said that the presentations were designed to give background on community intervention research and volunteerism, methods to scale up successful program models, and to identify ways in which community resources may be leveraged to obtain the most return on investment of public, private and community resources, using evidence-based interventions.

Dr. Rebok provided background on the history of the *Experience Corps* program, including its core elements; findings from a National Institute on Aging (NIA)-funded formal evaluation* of the program; methods and challenges of scaling up the program; and a discussion of "where do we go from here." [*NB full-text article describing evaluation research and results appended: Retrieved at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1551714413000700>]

The *Experience Corps* program brings older adults into public elementary schools to tutor and mentor children who are at risk of academic failure. The *Experience Corps* program was

designed in 1995, with pilot intervention beginning in Baltimore in 1998. It is a literacy support program and has expanded to over 20 cities and is now administered and funded by the AARP Foundation. In Baltimore the project recruited volunteers aged 60 or older who agreed to serve 15 or more hours a week for a full school year in the school in which they were placed. They received a taxable stipend funded by Americorps grants. They were required to have a literacy level of at least 6th grade and to have tested in the normal range on a cognitive assessment, though many volunteers had chronic illnesses. They also had to meet background screening requirements of the Baltimore city schools and to be acceptable to the school principal and classroom teachers in the school in which they were placed. Volunteers received extensive training and were part of a minimum-sized group of *Experience Corps* volunteers in any given school to achieve a “critical mass” to make a difference in the school and to have the support of other volunteers. While the Baltimore program began as a literacy support program, it was later expanded to include classroom management, behavioral intervention and cooperative play, as well as assistance in the school library.

The NIA-funded evaluation, which began in 2006 and concluded in 2011, found that on average each volunteer spent 21 hours weekly at his/her assigned school. The receipt of a stipend placed an economic value on the volunteers’ work and allowed volunteers of more limited means to participate. Some volunteers reinvested all or part of the stipend in the school. The evaluation also found that the program had positive effects on both students and volunteers. Students achieved improved educational and behavioral outcomes. For example, standard reading test scores rose and referrals to the principal’s office for behavioral issues fell. Volunteers also experienced an increase in mobility, a decrease in falls and frailty, and improved cognition such as a decreased rate of decline in memory. It was found that the program attracted volunteers who would not have engaged in health promotion activities, absent their participation in the Corps. There was a 90% year-to-year volunteer retention rate.

Ms. Thomsen asked if volunteers received any transportation support. Dr. Rebok said that efforts were made to place volunteers in their requested catchment area, but that transportation costs were borne personally out of their stipend. Dr. Li asked what recruitment strategies were utilized. Dr. Rebok said that recruitment efforts were mostly local--using recruitment strategies utilized by other programs such as a media blitz, including public service announcements on gospel radio stations; community outreach; and via state AARP membership lists. The program was less successful in recruiting men than women, with males accounting for only 15% of volunteers. Males also had a higher dropout rate. Ms. Kimble asked if there were any summer *Experience Corps* programs. Dr. Rebok said that this was not a feature of the Baltimore program.

Dr. Rebok also noted that there were numerous stakeholders participating in the program, including Americorps/VISTA whose grants funded the stipends; the Baltimore city schools, which bore some direct and indirect costs for participating in the program; the Greater Homewood Community Corp., which administered the program; and the Johns Hopkins University, which conducted the evaluation.

Dr. Li inquired whether there were sufficient numbers of volunteers and Dr. Rebok said that there were initially more people interested in participating than there were volunteer slots but that, over time, the potential volunteer population might be depleted. Ms. Vogel asked about the socioeconomic status of students and volunteers. Dr. Rebok stated that the programs are primarily located in major urban school districts, like Baltimore city, but that there are some exceptions nationally.

Ms. Roques noted that it was important that programs slated for possible scale-up, such as the *Experience Corps*, be evidence-based with a history of successful implementation. Dr. Rebok described a proposed project that, if funded, would utilize a model based on *Experience Corps*. Termed *MEMORI Corps*, it would utilize trained older adults to work with community-dwelling persons with dementia in the person's home, utilizing evidence-based activities. The program's evaluation would include factors such as the effects on the person with dementia, the person's caregiver(s) and the volunteers.

Secretary Kramer said that various counties have different volunteer programs in place. She said that Montgomery County had a sophisticated volunteer program. She said that she would solicit input on volunteer programs in their jurisdictions from directors of the area agencies on aging (AAA) during one of the periodic meetings between MDoA senior staff and the AAA directors. Ms. Vogel said that Howard County also has an active volunteer program and that there is a senior-center based program for community-dwelling people with dementia in some senior centers.

Next Steps:

Dr. Li inquired about how best the Commission could achieve its statutory charge to review ongoing statewide programs for seniors, noting that the NIA uses a structured process to review the research of each of its divisions on a rotating basis. Secretary Kramer stated that she welcomed the Commission's assistance in examining MDoA's current programs because she and Department staff recognize that strategies that were previously effective might no longer be effective and that there are emerging challenges facing the Department in the face of the increased numbers of Maryland older adults coupled with the flat growth in public resources to address older adults' needs. She cited as an example the growing waiting lists for some programs, and the potential variability in needs among persons on the lists, who might not have received preliminary assessment. She said that she would obtain input from senior staff to identify a program that might benefit from Commission review.

Several Commissioners inquired about plans for legislation in the upcoming legislative session, including whether Delegate Ben Kramer intended to reintroduce legislation proposing a *Senior Call Check* program, which was not enacted in the 2016 legislative session. Secretary Kramer said that plans for the legislative session are indefinite and that MDoA would analyze any legislation dealing with older adults introduced in the upcoming legislative session. Ms. Thomsen inquired about previously proposed legislation making changes to the Senior Center Operating Fund. Secretary Kramer stated that the proposed legislation had passed during the 2016 session and had been enacted. Ms. Vogel noted that she had attended the Howard

County Commission on Aging Legislative Breakfast and that local legislators planned to introduce a bill to make modifications to the homestead tax credit for older adults, which now applies only to older residents who have resided in the same dwelling for at least 40 years. She said that in Howard County, home to approximately 300,000 residents, only 138 households had qualified for the credit under existing criteria. The legislation would be designed to make the credit portable within Howard County and to decrease the number of years one would need to have lived in the same dwelling. Ms. Vogel said that she would distribute information on the issue to fellow Commissioners. Ms. Roques stated that it is important that the state and localities develop strategies to encourage older adults to remain in Maryland.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 PM

Minutes prepared by Rosanne B. Hanratty