

Frederick County Commission on Disabilities 2020 Annual Report

As part of its bylaws, the Frederick County Commission on Disabilities (COD) is required to submit an annual report to the County Executive to address three specific areas:

- (a) The status of services and programs for people with disabilities in the County;
- (b) Recommendations for the more effective delivery of services and programs to people with disabilities; and
- (c) Annual budget and policy priorities for delivery of services to people with disabilities.

Like so many other aspects of our community in 2020, the work of the COD was significantly impacted by COVID-19. The COD did not meet from April through June, 2020 due to safety measures enacted as a result of the public health emergency. With the County's support and in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, the COD along with other County boards and commissions resumed meeting through a virtual platform in July, 2020.

Our virtual meetings focused on gaining a better understanding of how persons with disabilities were uniquely impacted by the pandemic. We also discussed ways in which the COD could continue to support the community while abiding by the necessary safety measures in place for the health and well-being of all.

We also continued our practice of ensuring we remain informed about the services and programs available to persons with disabilities. We devoted a portion of each meeting to presentations from service organizations and advocates to educate Commissioners on issues, challenges, needs and successes within the community. COD Commissioners had the opportunity to ask questions and we used the information to guide our priorities and activities. This year the COD received presentations from:

- Peter Brehm and Kris Fair from The Frederick Center discussed mental health challenges within the LGBT+ community.
- Kendall Tiffany, Frederick County Transit Division, shared general information with the COD regarding transportation options available to County residents with disabilities. Kendall visited the COD again later in the year to provide information regarding the Transit Division's protocols enacted to ensure the health and safety of all passengers during COVID-19.
- Joe Hayer and Kevin Meyer from the City of Frederick Police Department updated the COD regarding how police officers are trained on the policies and procedures they are required to follow when interacting with persons with disabilities.
- Stuart Harvey from the Frederick County Board of Elections updated the COD regarding how the unique challenges presented by COVID-19 for persons with disabilities were being addressed for this year's general election.

The safety measures required by the pandemic forced the COD to postpone plans to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act originally planned for July. This in-person event was intended to bring together persons with disabilities, families, providers, government officials and other key stakeholders to discuss the past, present and future of the ADA, share resources and build community. In early 2021, the COD will revisit the issue of whether to move forward with plans to hold the event in July, 2021.

Despite the pandemic, the COD continued with recruitment and appointment efforts. In September, 2020, two new Commissioners joined the COD and another Commissioner was reappointed for a second term. However, two of the three Commissioners up for reappointment opted not to reapply, so the COD continues to conduct outreach to identify potential candidates to fill remaining vacancies. The COD is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion and seeks to recruit candidates who represent the racial and ethnic diversity of Frederick County.

We elected a slate of officers in September and we continue to hold regular Executive and Full Commission meetings virtually.

The COD increased its presence on social media platforms this year, particularly Facebook and Twitter. These efforts were particularly critical during the pandemic as we sought to share credible, accurate and timely information with our community. We also shared voting information to ensure that persons with disabilities were aware of the options available to cast their ballots. In October, we celebrated Disability Employment Awareness Month by sharing success stories, resources and information about employment rights.

Despite the challenges presented to the COD this year, Commissioners remain committed to the effort to build an inclusive community for persons with disabilities in Frederick County.