

Howard County Commission on
Disabilities

ANNUAL REPORT

-2021 -



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

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IN MEMORIAM

Commissioner Elliott Finkelstein

The Commission on Disabilities mourns the passing of its chairman, Elliott Finkelstein, in October 2020. Elliott was a champion of disability rights. He was zealous in his advocacy for equal access through policy and infrastructure changes. At the time of his death, Elliott was serving a second term as a commissioner. Elliott also served on the Access Committee and was an appointed member of the HoCo by Design's Planning Advisory Committee.

Elliott is fondly remembered for his big heart, sense of humor and a knack for starting meetings with his icebreaking New Jersey haikus.

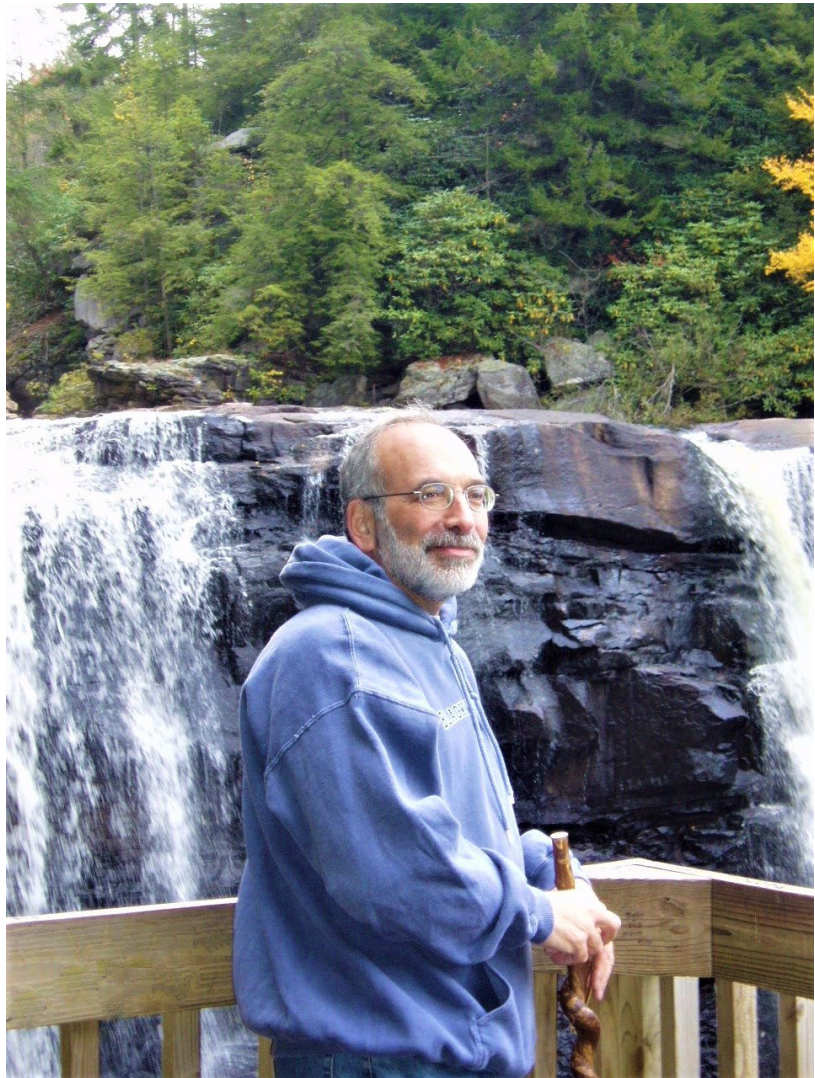
The Commission is grateful for Elliott's leadership and his numerous and invaluable contributions to the people of Howard County.

Haikus in Memory of Elliott

*Our dear Elliott
You have left us far too soon
A hole in our hearts*
Marian Vessels,
Commissioner

*Elliott, Dear Friend
You had such wicked humor
Haiku in heaven*
Marian Vessels,
Commissioner

*Sweet man Elliot
your voice will always be there
laughing and joking*
Karen Wood, Commissioner



THE COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES

Commissioners

Doug Lea, Chair

Marian Vessels, Vice Chair

Adeniyi Michael Adekoya

Elizabeth Benevides

Heidi Burghardt

Nicole Czarnecki

Arthur Gold*

Joshua Hirsh

Andrea Kolp*

Randy Murbach*

Greg Schuckman

George Stephens

Steven Towne

Mia Williams

Karen Wood

*no longer serving on the Commission

Primary Responsibilities

The Howard County Commission on Disabilities (Commission) was established by statute in 1988 to, among other things, increase public awareness and advise County Government on local governmental programs, policies and budget and assist with ensuring compliance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Staff

The Commission is staffed by the following employees from the Department of Community Resources and Services:

Michelle Henry, Executive Secretary

Terry Zeigler, Recording Secretary

Erica Lewis, Staff Liaison

Contact Information

Office of ADA Coordination

Department of Community Resources
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MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



Adeniyi Michael (Olu) Adekoya graduated from the University of Maryland Global Campus, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science; Minor in Accounting. Olu is the founder and president of Watercourse Systems. He has professional digital marketing experience and mastery of online sales and e-commerce. In 2017, while studying at the University of Hartford, Olu was selected to serve as a peer tutor, mentor and liaison. In response to the attack/harassment of a student of color, Olu co-founded and served as the first vice president for the NAACP University of Hartford campus branch. He wrote the statement of intent for the branch, detailing the reasons for its formation and goals for

the school's future. Olu served as liaison to the faculty advisor and was instrumental in laying the foundation for the organization. Over the course of two semesters, Olu served as treasurer for the University of Hartford Village Community Council, where he gained experience in financial management, accounting/bookkeeping, events planning.

Olu's volunteer and community service experience include creating a Christian ministry called Jesus World Ministries, through which he led peaceful protests in Washington, DC and spoke at the Lincoln Memorial; planned and executed multiple voter registration drives; worked with and coordinated volunteers and businesses to deliver food from stores, restaurants, and businesses to social service organizations with the purpose of feeding the hungry and food insecure.

Elizabeth (Beth) Benevides is director of outreach at the Hussman Institute for Autism and associate director of the Hussman Foundation. She is a longtime policy and educational advocate for individuals and families affected by autism and related developmental disabilities.

Beth is highly connected to the disability community at a local and state level. She served as the longtime president of the Howard County Autism Society, an award-winning chapter of the Autism Society, and currently serves on the national Autism Society's Board of Directors. She is a member of several statewide workgroups devoted to programs, education, civil rights, and policy affecting people with autism. Beth is an advisory member of the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at Kennedy Krieger Institute; an appointed member of the Maryland Department



of Disabilities' Ethan Saylor Alliance for Self-Advocates steering committee; and former co-chair of the Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities in Howard County.

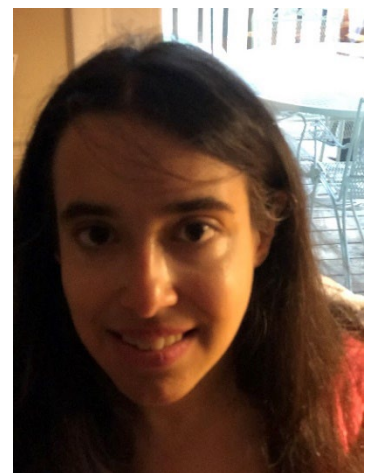
Beth is a certified special education advocate and member of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Beth's son has autism and intellectual disabilities. About her son, Beth said, "His full integration and inclusion in our community is key to his happiness and his living a 'good life.' I cannot imagine him living anywhere other than Howard County! He has provided me with the passion for advocacy each and every day."



Heidi A. Burghardt is a federal government employee with the U.S. Secret Service. Heidi received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Criminology at the University of Maryland, College Park. For more than a decade, Heidi has been involved in several Deaf organizations and panels on matters that affect the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community. Her experience has enabled her to serve the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government (now Deaf in Government (DIG)) and the Howard County Association of the Deaf, which focuses on issues faced by Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing citizens in Howard County.

Heidi chose to serve on the Commission in order to help make positive changes to improve the lives of people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing as well as individuals with disabilities. An avid reader, she is interested in biographies and current events. Hobbies include traveling, photography, biking, walking and reading; and most importantly, Heidi enjoys spending quality time with her family.

Born in 1990 – the same year in which the ADA was passed – **Nicole Czarnecki** has been a lifelong resident of Howard County. She was diagnosed with spastic diplegic cerebral palsy at one and a half years old, and received diagnoses of OCD/anxiety, depression, and ADD within a span of 22 years. Besides advocating for people with disabilities, Nicole is working on becoming a full-time author to be representative of people who happen to have disabilities and are not defined by or as their disabilities. She wants to have a platform to demonstrate that people with disabilities are people (and not their disabilities) and can live successful lives as well as have prominent platforms to advocate for and, help others.



Nicole continues to seek ways to use her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Nicole's studies allowed her to segue seamlessly into being appointed to the Commission by then-County Executive Allan Kittleman and reappointed by County Executive Calvin Ball. Nicole lives in Howard County with her family and pets.

Joshua Hirsh graduated from Howard Community College with Phi Theta Kappa Honors with a degree in political science. He is employed as a paralegal with a law firm that specializes in Elder Law and Estate Planning. Having a strong desire to support and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities, he was honored to be appointed to the Commission in 2020.



Joshua has cerebral palsy and regularly attends the Annual Jewish Disability Advocacy Day in DC, where he advocates on a national level. Josh is active in local politics. He served as past vice president of The Young Democrats of Howard County and interned in the office of County Executive Calvin Ball. He has been awarded the prestigious Louis Goldstein Spirit Award. His hobbies include gourmet food, travel, sports and politics.

Doug Lea serves as chair of the Commission. Doug has been living with chronic neck and shoulder pain for nearly 30 years as a result of injuries. In 2005, he lost his vocal cords to cancer and has limited voice control and volume as a result. He joined the Commission in 2013 with no specific agenda other than responding to a call for volunteers.

Doug is a retired board-certified elementary and middle school band director and taught in and around his hometown of Columbia for 33 years. With degrees and certifications in music education, counseling, and administration, his leadership highlights include chairing the Professional Standards and Practice Committee for the National Education Association and serving (currently) on the Board of Directors for the National Board for Professional Teaching. He is the immediate past vice-president of the Howard County Education Association.



Doug is a proud Columbia Pioneer who enjoys traveling, making music, the burning man community, and oil painting. Along with his husband, Bob, he has two children and three grandchildren.



Greg Schuckman is one of the newest members of the Commission and joins the Commission with a distinguished background in higher education, government relations, nonprofit leadership and being an advocate for people with disabilities, particularly those living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Greg has been living with MS for more than 20 years and has been active with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society as a trustee and board chair, national advocate, and Walk MS captain. Greg also serves as a consumer reviewer for the Department of Defense Multiple Sclerosis Research Program and has been participating in clinical trials at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since 2000.

Greg describes his interest in serving on the Commission this way: “Being an advocate for people who live with disabilities and helping to effect change that positively impacts lives, is incredibly fulfilling.

Public service has always been important to me, and I have been incredibly fortunate to have been appointed by four governors across three states from both sides of the aisle over the past 30 years to serve on state and national commissions, in addition to serving on a number of other public boards and commissions in Virginia and Maryland (including here in Howard County). What makes this appointment special is the ability to bridge my professional experience of being an advocate (I have been a higher ed lobbyist for the past 20 years) and my lived experience of having a disability and connecting that to serving the community that I live and love – Howard County. I am excited to serve with my colleagues on the Commission and to make Howard County an exemplar for communities across the nation that rise up to truly meet the needs of their residents who live with a disability.”

Steven Towne is the father of a daughter with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Steven serves as a volunteer for Special Olympics of Howard County, the Columbia Amateur Radio Association, Community Organizations Active in Disaster, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and other community service organizations. Steven has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brigham Young University; and a Master of Science from the National War College. Steven said, “Our daughter has benefitted so much from all that is here in Howard County, so I wanted to volunteer on the Commission as a small way of giving back to the community.”





George Stephens has resided in Columbia since 1974 and has been involved in various volunteer activities around the area. George is a retired systems engineer. Becoming a member of the Commission has given him the opportunity to contribute to the community. George explained, “Serving on this commission seems to be a way of extending my previous volunteer activities and learning more about our county government.”

George’s service in and around Howard County include his contributions as president and vice president of the Soccer Association of Columbia; volunteering as a canine search and rescue technician for wilderness search missions looking for people lost in the woods; serving as a member of

Mid-Atlantic D.O.G.S., and as member of the Montgomery County Animal Rescue Team, a volunteer program that provides emergency animal shelters.

George is a therapy dog handler and service dog trainer with Fidos For Freedom, an organization that trains and deploys therapy and service dogs. George and his wife have raised five service dog puppies in their home. He serves as an instructor for prison trainers at the Federal Correction Institution in Cumberland.

Marian Vessels serves as vice-chair of the Commission and is in her second term. Marian is Principal for MSV Consulting, which provides training and consulting services on disability issues and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She served as director of the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center from 1996 to 2017. Marian developed *At Your Service*, a free online customer service film, and an online resource, *Accessible Meetings, Events and Conferences Guide*.



For nine years, Marian served as executive director of the Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. She also served as Special Assistant to the Governor for Disability Issues. Marian holds a Bachelor of Science degree from California State University at Long Beach, Long Beach, CA. She is a Certified Health Education Specialist, (National Certification); a Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund ADA Trainer and Facilitator and Windmills Trainer.

Marian's professional and volunteer affiliations include the Mid Atlantic ADA Center Advisory Board (chair); Maryland Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee (gubernatorial appointment); Maryland Pedestrian Sub-committee (chair); Howard County Aging Initiative (January 2019 - June 2021) (co-Chair Outdoor Workgroup; member, Transportation Workgroup); and Board of Directors, Accessible Resources for Independence, Inc., Center for Independent Living.

Marian's numerous awards, honors and citations include Doctor of Humane Letters, Towson State University, January 1995; EC Thompson Hall of Fame for Rehabilitation in Maryland 2005; Reverend Douglas Sands Community Service Award: Maryland Association of Equal Opportunity Personnel 2004; Maryland Rehabilitation Association Leadership Award 2003; and Miss Wheelchair America, 1981. Marian had a Spinal Cord Injury (T-6) in July 1974 and underwent rehabilitation at Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Center, Downey, Ca. from July 1974 - December 1974.

Mia Williams is the mother of two sons, the oldest of whom is on the autism spectrum and is in high school. She has served on the parent panel of Towson University's Autism Education Series, as the Parent Liaison for Special Needs Students at her son's school, serves on the Board of Directors for the Howard County Autism Society and is a strong advocate for her son. She joined the Commission in order to help improve services, create opportunities and enrich the lives of people living with disabilities in Howard County.



Karen Wood is serving her second term on the Commission. She decided to get involved in the work of the Commission because she cares deeply about the rights of individuals with disabilities to live full and productive lives without the limitations created by discrimination, bias, physical and other barriers.

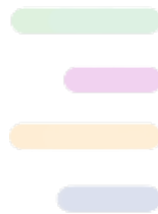
As a person who is blind and partnered with Dolly, her lovely Seeing Eye® golden retriever, Karen has faced much in the way of discrimination and ignorance of others regarding her right to full access to places of public accommodations with her guide dog. Karen believes that society has come a long way in the past couple of decades since the passage of the ADA, but says we still have a long way to go. Karen's goal is to continue to do her part to keep us moving forward to the day when all people are treated equally with dignity, respect and compassion.

Karen received her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education with an endorsement in kindergarten from Purdue University in 1981. In her junior year, she received the Mallott scholarship, which is awarded to the top student in the School of Consumer and Family Sciences. After spending seven years as a homemaker while raising her two children, she taught preschool for eighteen years. Karen was forced into early retirement because of sight loss.

After retiring from teaching, Karen began volunteering in many capacities where she felt she could make a difference helping others. This has included teaching Sunday school classes, volunteering at a day shelter serving people who are homeless, teaching children about service dogs and teaching meditation to inmates in three Maryland prisons.

Karen serves on the board of directors of Ski For Light, a non-profit all-volunteer organization, which organizes annual week-long cross-country ski events across the U.S. and provides volunteer sighted guides so that people who are blind and people with mobility disabilities, can experience the joy of cross-country skiing. Karen embraces Ski For Light's motto, "If I can do this, I can do anything."

Karen is a committed mindfulness practitioner and meditates regularly. She enjoys reading, taking classes through the Johns Hopkins Osher Program, gardening, tandem bicycling, kayaking, hiking, working out at the gym, taking long walks with her guide dog, and attending theatre performances.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS – THE COMMISSION’S ACTIVITIES

Increase public awareness

Art Exhibit

The Commission hosted a virtual art contest in 2020 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the ADA, with the theme of “ADA30. Disability. Equity. Inclusion. One County. Accessible to All.” Winners were announced in late December 2020.

The winning art pieces were scheduled for exhibit at the County’s October 2021 Diversity Day celebration. This event, unfortunately, was cancelled due to the pandemic. The art work will be housed at the Department of Community Resources and Services building, located at 9830 Patuxent Woods Drive in Columbia.



*“Daughter of Deafness” Artist: Varia, Shivani
First Place, Category C, ADA30 Art Contest*

Hosted Presentation on Advocacy and the 2021 Legislative Session

On March 17, the Commission’s Provider Committee hosted a virtual presentation detailing key legislation impacting people with disabilities and their families. The presentation also included an overview of the legislative process and the basics of advocacy, highlighting how and when individuals can influence proposed legislation.

Hosted Presentation on Maryland Work Incentives Network

On September 22, the Provider Committee hosted a virtual presentation on the Maryland Work Incentives Network (MD-WIN), a free statewide program helping people who receive disability benefits understand and use work incentives available under SSDI and SSI.

Hosted Presentation on Funding Resources for Home Accessibility Modifications

On November 17, the Provider Committee hosted a virtual presentation on tax credits, grants, and loan programs for home modifications. The presentation detailed the Maryland Independent Living Income Tax Credit Program, the Howard County Livable Homes Property Tax Credit Program, the Statewide Portable Ramp Loan Program, the Independent Living Assistive Technology Grant Program, and the Maryland Technology Assistance Loan Program.

Advise on local governmental programs and policies and assist with ensuring county government's compliance with accessibility requirements

Participated in COVID Vaccine Telephone Town Hall

County officials hosted a COVID vaccine town hall on February 6 to answer questions and concerns from Howard County residents regarding vaccine distribution. Members of the Commission participated in the town hall to gather information regarding accessibility of the vaccine registration process and of facilities and sites where the vaccine was being administered.

Participated in Active Transportation Open House

The Office of Transportation hosted a virtual Active Transportation Open House, from February 19 to 26. Members of the Commission participated in the open house.

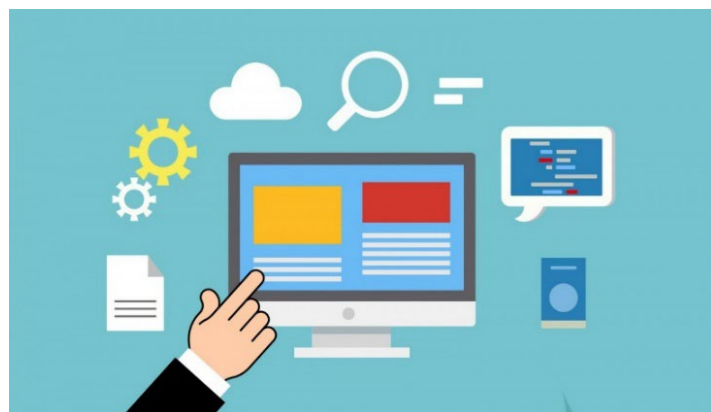
Provided Input on County's General Plan Update

Members of the Commission participated in a March 25 focus group to share and discuss their views on transportation, recreation, neighborhood amenities and housing, community and neighborhood character, economic diversity, inclusion, and equity in the County. DPZ also hosted a General Plan Workshop Series from August 31 to September 14, to share the Plan's recommendations with the public and solicit comments about the County's future growth, development, and preservation. Members of the Commission attended the workshops and provided input on the Plan.



Provided Input on Loan Closet's Assistive Devices

In March, the Loan Closet solicited input regarding the purchase of devices to assist with hearing, vision, speech, and to mitigate the effects of social isolation. Members of the Commission reviewed the proposed purchases and provided feedback and recommendations.



Reviewed WebEx Accessibility

In response to questions regarding the WebEx meeting platform's accessibility features, the Department of Technology and Communication met with members of the Commission on April 22 to review WebEx's enhanced features.

Met with County Executive for Updates on CR 23-2018 Report Recommendations

Commissioners met with the County Executive and members of his leadership team on April 26 to receive an update on the Commission's CR 23-2018 report recommendations. The discussion included highlights of improvements in employment, housing, peer relationships, and transportation. The County Executive also presented current information on distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the County, including planned distribution to the disability community.



Commissioner Heidi Burghardt

Contributed to County Government's Employee ADA Training Modules

In April and May, as part of County Government's employee ADA training initiative, Commissioners Heidi Burghardt and Karen Wood worked with County staff to record training modules on effectively communicating with people who are deaf and hard of hearing and on service animals.



Commissioner Karen Wood

Toured New Courthouse

The Commission's Access Committee took a virtual tour of the new courthouse on June 3, via a video created by the Department of Public Works (DPW). Members noted various accessibility features of the new facility, including accessible parking, automatic door openers at the front building entrance, accessible seating, and a restroom with an adult changing table. The group's questions regarding certain accessible features were submitted to DPW.

Provided Input on Re-design of Historic Ellicott City ADA Guidance

DPZ, as part of the process of drafting new design guidelines for historic Ellicott City, invited input from the Commission. On June 3, members of the Access Committee reviewed the ADA office's draft compilation of relevant ADA guidelines, for submission to DPZ.

Reviewed Housing Opportunities Master Plan

The Commission met with Director Kelly Cimino of the Department of Housing and Community Development on June 28 for a presentation on the County's Housing Opportunities Master Plan. Commissioners provided input on implementation of the Plan.

Provided Input on Age-Friendly Howard County Plan

Commissioner Marian Vessels co-chaired the Outdoor Spaces and Buildings workgroup and was a member of the Transportation workgroup for the Age-Friendly Howard County initiative. As part of the process for finalizing the first Action Plan, the Department of Community Resources and Services held a public comment period in July for residents. Members of the Commission participated by submitting comments on the proposed plan to help ensure an inclusive community for people of all ages and stages of life.

Completed Potential Re-use of Historic Circuit Courthouse Survey

County officials hosted a July 20 public meeting to discuss potential re-use of the vacant historic circuit courthouse and adjacent properties in Ellicott City. A public survey was distributed to solicit feedback from the community. Members of the Commission completed the survey and highlighted the need to consider accessibility and compliance with ADA standards throughout the planning process for re-use of the property.

Observed Meeting of Historic Preservation Commission

To better understand the purpose and procedures of the Historic Preservation Commission, specifically with regard to promoting accessibility of historic properties, members of the Access Committee observed the Historic Preservation Commission's September 2 meeting.

Participated in Community Equity Survey

The Office of Human Rights and Equity conducted a Community Equity Survey in August to identify institutional and structural practices which produce inequities in services, policies, and access. The survey focused on racial and social equity, opportunity, and quality of life. Members of the Commission participated in the survey to help County Government better understand views about quality of life and inclusion.

Toured Bain Center

The Access Committee took a virtual tour of the newly-renovated Bain Center on November 8. Members noted various accessibility features of the renovated facility, including signage, parking and the facility's public transit bus stop. The group's questions and recommendations regarding certain accessible features were submitted to the Office of Aging and Independence.



CR 23-2018 REPORT — SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

The Commission was required by Council Resolution 23-2018, to study the status of people with disabilities in Howard County and the County’s ability to provide services to County residents with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, housing, peers relationships and transportation. The resolution also directed the Commission to submit a report and recommend actions that should be taken by the County. *CR 23-2018 Report on the Status of People with Disabilities in Howard County* (hereinafter, *CR 23-2018 Report*) was released in April 2019. For the full report, visit:

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/StatusofPeoplewithDisabilitiesinHowardCounty.pdf>



This progress report provides an update on some, but by no means all, of the Commission’s *CR 23-2018 Report* findings and recommendations. It is broken down into the five areas that were studied.

Prevalence and nature of disabilities in Howard County

This update does not reflect changes in prevalence and nature of disabilities in Howard County. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and problems that the Census Bureau had in conducting face-to-face interviews, as of the writing of this report, the Census Bureau had not released American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2020 and 2021.

Also, the decennial Census no longer reports on disability status. With the advent of the ACS, the Census Bureau abandoned the Census Long Form and now only collects and reports on more basic data in the decennial Census (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity).

This progress report provides an update on some, but by no means all, of the Commission’s CR 23-2018 Report findings and recommendations.



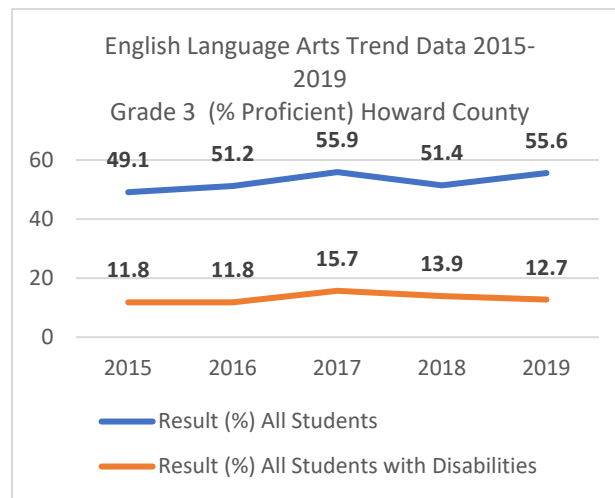
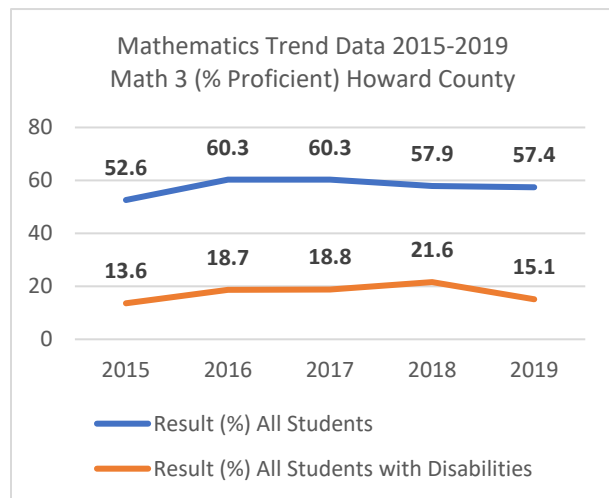
EDUCATION

A significant portion of the Commission’s *CR 23-2018 Report* on education was dedicated to analyzing academic performance of students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities. The information in this update regarding education is derived from a review of school social media and websites, an April 2019 Special Education Board of Education Report,¹ HCPSS’ Special Education Staffing Plan for Fiscal Year 2020² and the Maryland Public Schools Report Card (MSDE Report Card) website.³

Academic achievement of HCPSS’ students with disabilities

One of the Commission’s key *CR 23-2018 Report* recommendations was that HCPSS focus on narrowing achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

The charts that follow illustrate the performance of students with disabilities in Grades 3 and 8 Math and English Language Arts and their performance relative to students in other schools districts. The data was compiled from the MSDE Report Card website and reflects the most current data available to the public at the time of this writing.



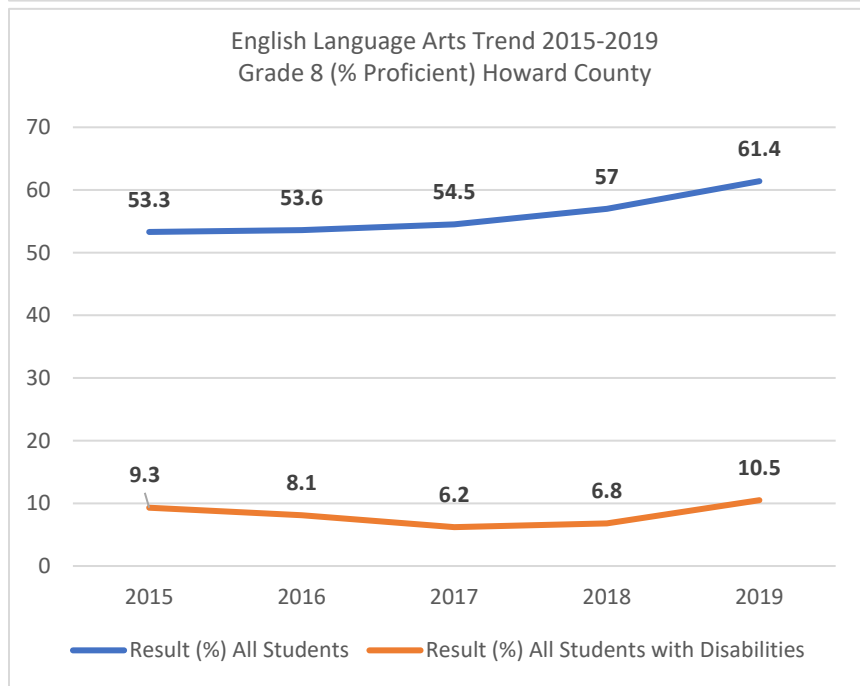
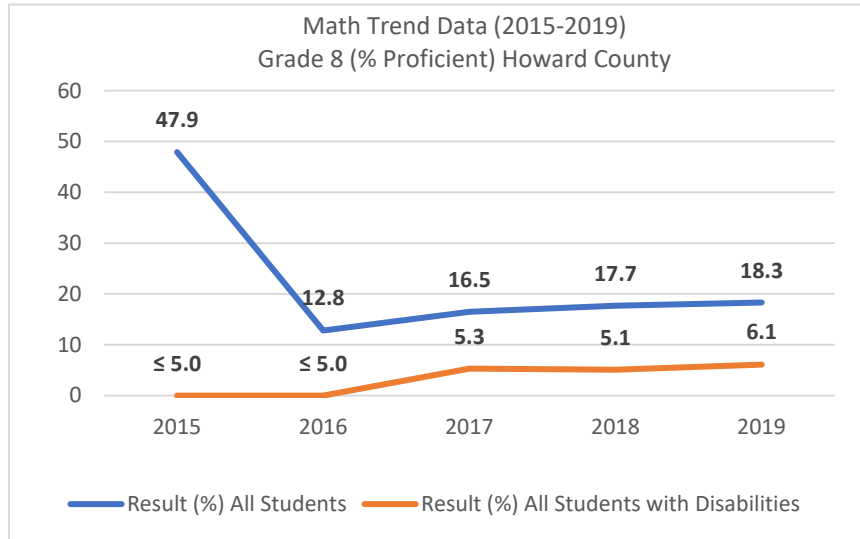
¹ Special Education Board Report, March 20, 2019, Howard County Public School System. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/2019-04-09-special-ed-boe-report.pdf>

² Staffing Plan FY 20, Howard County Public Schools System. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/special-ed-staffing-plan.pdf>

³ Link to Maryland Public Schools Report Card website; <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>

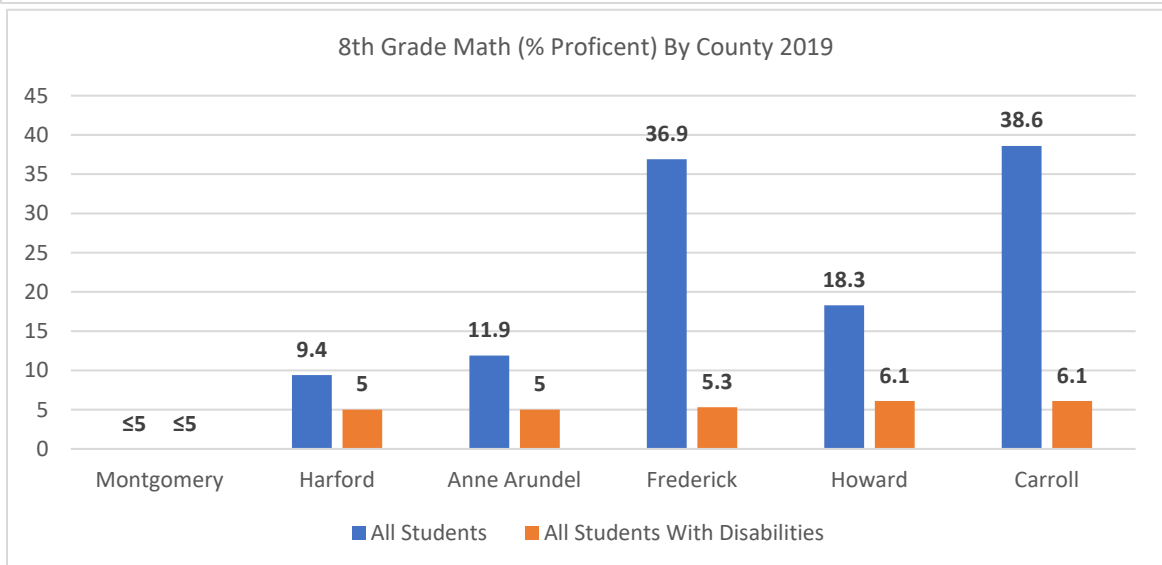
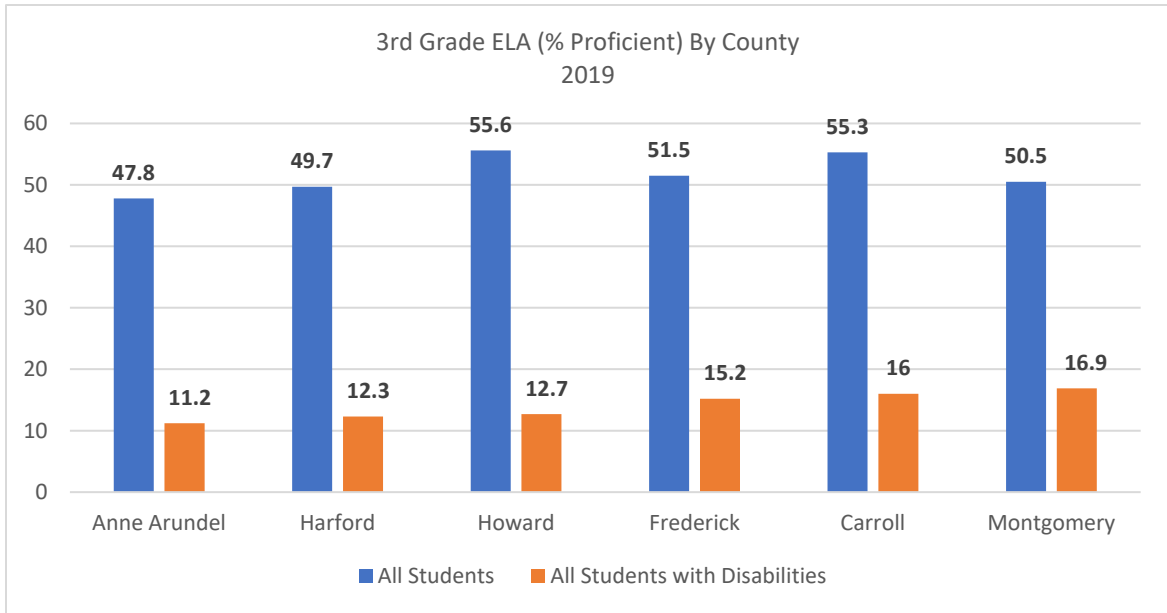
According to the MSDE Report Card, as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, results for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years will not be published. The most recently available MSDE Report Card is for 2018-2019.⁴

The data shows there remains a wide gap between the levels of achievement for students with and without disabilities; and proficiency among students with disabilities remains low. This trend is of particular concern given that the data reflects pre-pandemic data trends. In December 2021, the Maryland State Department of Education released a report regarding preliminary early fall assessment and kindergarten readiness scores for the 2021-22 school year, which demonstrated an overall decline for all students in proficiency for English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and Kindergarten Readiness.⁵



⁴ See <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/E/1/13/XXXX/2019>

⁵ See <https://news.maryland.gov/msde/maryland-early-fall-assessment-data-and-kindergarten-readiness-results-reflect-national-trends-on-learning-loss/>

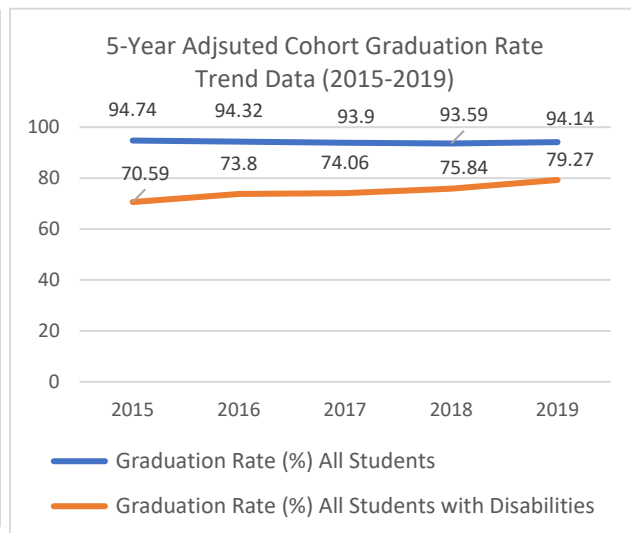
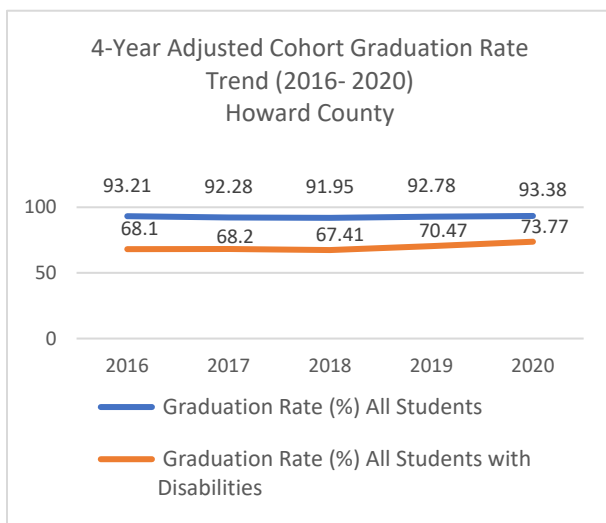


Rate of graduation with a High School Diploma

In the *CR 23-2018 Report*, the Commission found that while HCPSS’ students with disabilities were meeting Maryland’s targeted graduation rate, HCPSS’ graduation rate was lagging behind other jurisdictions.



As illustrated in the charts here, the four and five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for HCPSS students with disabilities saw an increase in school years 2019 and 2020.



CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Implement DSE’s Strategic Plan⁶

The Commission recommended in its *CR 23-2018 Report* that HCPSS continue to implement the Special Education Strategic Plan and the Learning and Leading in Equity Strategic Call to Action, with a focus on narrowing achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers and eliminating disproportionality in areas set by the state and required by the federal government.

DSE reported development of a comprehensive professional learning plan for all special education teachers, related service providers and support staff. DSE reported that training included paraeducators and student assistants during scheduled sessions throughout the year and that ABA-based training was provided for temporary employees.

⁶ *Strategic Plan 2017-2020*, Howard County Public School System, Department of Special Education. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/2017-2020-dse-strategic-plan.pdf>

In its Report to the Howard County Board of Education (BOE)⁷, the HCPSS Department of Special Education (DSE) cites:

✔ Expanding service options for students in the 2018-2019 school year, by adding regional Academic/Life Skills, Emotional Disability, and other intensive classrooms in five school locations to expand the continuum and address increases in student needs across the district. The report also states that a special educator transitions with students into the general education setting to ensure generalization of skills in the grade level classroom.⁸

✔ Making effort towards strengthening instructional intervention in the form of specialized training in structured literacy to special educators, reading specialists and reading support teachers.⁹

✔ Addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in Regional ED Programs, by consulting an expert in Restorative Justice, who facilitated training on restorative circles as well as trauma informed practices.¹⁰

✔ Engaging restorative coaches who visited regional programs to observe community-building using restorative practices and provide coaching to staff to further develop their restorative tools and providing sessions for families.¹¹

✔ Development of a girls' group in the 2018-2019 school year to provide meeting opportunities for middle school girls with disabilities. According to the report, each month, the small group met to develop social connections and practice communication and social skills. DSE reported that themed gatherings were well-attended by several girls and that not only did they provide connections for the girls, but the groups also provided parents an opportunity to support one another and share their experiences.¹²

✔ Development of a comprehensive professional learning plan for all special education teachers, related service providers and support staff that included paraeducators and student assistants during scheduled sessions throughout the year. DSE reported that ABA-based training was provided for temporary employees.¹³

✔ Continued implementation of transition services to students and expansion of the role of the transition teacher to ensure all transitioning youth with IEPs are provided useful information and support.¹⁴

⁷ Special Education Board Report, March 20, 2019, Howard County Public School System. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/2019-04-09-special-ed-boe-report.pdf>

⁸ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁹ Ibid., p.11

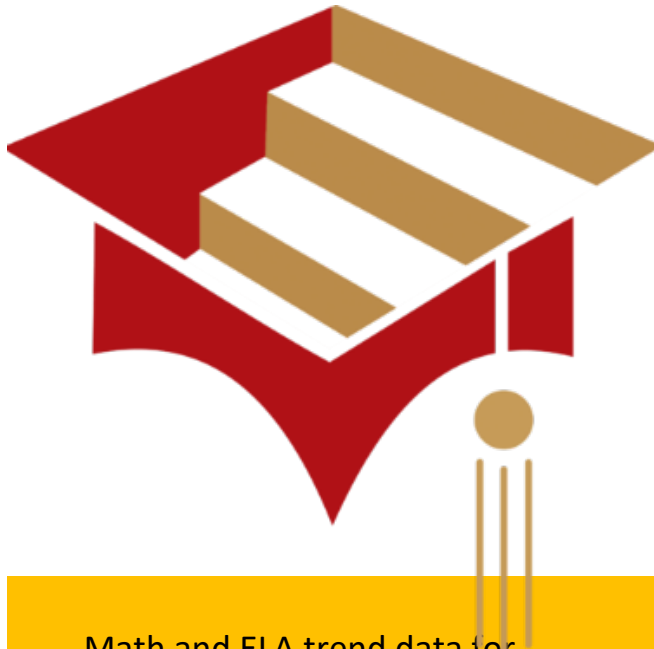
¹⁰ Ibid., p.11

¹¹ Ibid., p.11

¹² Ibid., p.11.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.12.



Math and ELA trend data for 2015-2019 show that students with and without disabilities at Homewood Center are performing at a significantly lower rate than other HCPSS students.

Homewood Center

In the *23-2018 Report*, the Commission noted that relative to the composition of the general education population, there is a disproportionate representation of Black/African Americans students who are classified as students with a disability. The Commission also noted the gap in academic performance between Black/African American students with disabilities and other students with disabilities and recommended that HCPSS eliminate disproportionality in areas such as race and disability as required by state and federal mandates. The Commission used the MSDE Report Card to evaluate progress in this area.

Of special interest to the Commission is the Homewood Center. In 2019, with Black/African Americans students making up 24% of HCPSS' entire student population, 73 of the 130 students (56%) enrolled at Homewood were classified as Black/African American, 29 (22%) were classified as White and 13 (10%) as Hispanic.¹⁵ In 2020, there were 122 students enrolled at Homewood with

Black/African American students numbering 70 or 57.3% of the student population, White students 30 (24.5%) and Hispanic students 14 (11.4%).¹⁶ While it is not clear from available data, the percentage of Black/African American students at Homewood with disabilities, according to the MSDE Report Card, 48.9% of the students at Homewood have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as students with disabilities, and another 10.9% have Section 504 Plans. Math and ELA trend data for 2015-2019 show that students with and without disabilities at Homewood are performing at a significantly lower rate than other HCPSS students.¹⁷ Students

¹⁵ MSDE Report Card, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/Enrollment/3/17/10/13/0080/2019>

¹⁶ MSDE Report Card, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/Enrollment/3/17/10/13/0080>

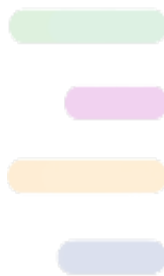
¹⁷ MSDE Report Card, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/ReportCards/ReportCardSchool/1/M/1/13/0080/2019>

with and without disabilities at Homewood have a significantly lower graduation rate than all HCPSS' graduating students.¹⁸

A review of available data tells us that, on the whole, Homewood has a higher dropout rate and poorer post-secondary outcomes than all HCPSS' students.¹⁹



Photo Credit: <https://www.freepik.com/photos/study-group> Study group photo created by lookstudio – www.freepik.com



¹⁸ MSDE Report Card, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/AtaGlance/Index/3/17/6/13/0080>

¹⁹ MSDE Report Card, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Graduation/CollegeEnroll/6/3/1/1/13/0080>

HCPSS funding

•Fiscal Year 2022 operating budget provides HCPSS a total County allocation of \$640.8 million, an increase of \$20.5 million over the prior year and \$8.0 million more than the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Level. This represents the largest increase of MOE in seven years and provides record level funding for special education.

See: *Howard County Council Passes County Executive Ball's Budget with Record School Funding* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 26, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News052621b>



•Fiscal Year 2022 Capital Budget includes nearly \$60 million to support the construction of the school system's top three priority projects: Hammond High School, Talbot Springs Elementary, and the new High School #13 in Jessup, the first new high school in Howard County since 2005.

See: *County Executive Ball Emphasizes Progress Through Adversity in 2021 State of the County* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 17, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News111621>



•Fiscal Year 2021 capital budget maintained support to three high-priority school construction projects (High School #13, Talbott Springs Elementary School and Hammond High School) and provided historically high funding to the school system (with \$620.3 million in FY 21, a \$13.1 million increase (2.2 percent) over the previous year's budget and which exceeded Maintenance of Effort (MOE) levels by \$2.7 million). The County made a \$5.75 million investment to secure 10 acres of land to bring a new school to Turf Valley.

See: *County Executive Ball Emphasizes Progress Through Adversity in 2021 State of the County* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 17, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News111621>



CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Expand mental health services

The Commission needs additional information from DSE to better understand whether school-based mental health services have been expanded and whether data is being collected to measure outcomes. The Commission gleaned the following information regarding DSE's mental health services:



DSE reported that it consulted an expert in Restorative Justice to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in Regional Emotional Disabilities Programs; provided staff coaching and family sessions.²⁰



From a review of the Homewood Center's website,²¹ it appears that the Homewood Center offers a continuum of services to meet its students' social-emotional needs. Community mental health services are reportedly provided to students through a program called Community Counseling Connections. Services include individual, group, and family supports and interventions. Homewood's website says it "has offered" anger management groups, art therapy, yoga, character education groups, effective parenting workshops, social skills groups, and substance abuse treatment and support through providers that are hired contractually through the Howard County Public Schools System.

County Government's efforts to expand mental health services



\$2 million in new funding to provide enhanced mental health services in schools. In partnership with the Horizon Foundation, the Kahlert Foundation, and the Howard County Public School System, all 78 public schools will have direct access to a social worker.²²



Increased investment to assist the Mobile Crisis Team to ensure 24/7 coverage for anyone who finds themselves in an emergency mental health situation. This program is a joint effort with Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center and the Howard County Police Department.²³



A record \$1.5 million invested in Howard County's residential treatment facilities – Sheppard Pratt, Hilda's Place, and Howard House – to hire case managers and peer

²⁰ Special Education Board Report, Howard County Public School System. (March 20, 2019), p.11. <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/2019-04-09-special-ed-boe-report.pdf>

²¹See <https://hc.hcpss.org/counseling-services>

²² *County Executive Ball Emphasizes Progress Through Adversity in 2021 State of the County* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 17, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News111621>

²³ *County Executive Ball Emphasizes Progress Through Adversity in 2021 State of the County* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 17, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News111621>

support specialists and implement reliable transportation so clients can maintain appointments more easily.²⁴



Howard County is the only jurisdiction in the state of Maryland to offer a Communications Initiated Referral to Crisis (CIRC) program, which connects those who dial 911 for a mental health crisis to a trained professional at Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center.²⁵



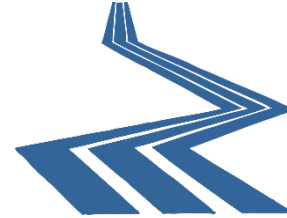
To raise awareness and provide more mental health services to youth, the County Executive launched “[It’s OK to Ask](#)”.



Suicide Prevention campaign in 2019.²⁶



May 2019, Howard County recognized Mental Health Awareness Month.²⁷



The County’s new and expanded mental health investments include:²⁸

Supporting people in crisis with expert assistance through behavioral health navigation

Reforming criminal justice approach to mental health through a behavioral health court liaison

Supporting young children’s social emotional development by expanding programs serving the mental health needs of young children

Building youth resiliency through a rapid access mental health program providing counseling and psychiatric services with case management support for children and youth 2-24

²⁴ *Howard County Makes Its Largest Investment in Residential Treatment with \$1.5 Million in Grants* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (October 5, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News100521>

²⁵ *Howard County Police to Direct Some Non-Emergency 911 Calls to Mental Health Experts* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (June 24, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/news062421>

²⁶ *County Executive Ball Announces, “It’s OK To Ask” Youth Suicide Prevention Campaign* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (February 28, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/health/county-executive-ball-announces-its-ok-ask-youth-suicide-prevention-campaign>

²⁷ *County Executive Ball Celebrates Mental Health Awareness Month With Policy Action* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 28, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-celebrates-mental-health-awareness-month-policy-action>

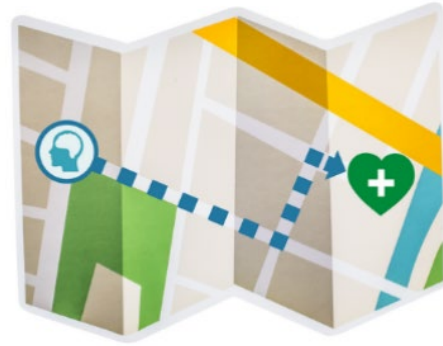
²⁸ *County Executive Ball Celebrates Mental Health Awareness Month With Policy Action* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 28, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-celebrates-mental-health-awareness-month-policy-action>

Facilitating therapeutic skills for families by expanding the service to families with private insurance

Preventing youth suicide

Keeping families together and healthy through the Local Care Team (LCT)

New and expanded mental health investments also include:



FY2020 – County-funding of an innovative public-private partnership to pilot Howard House, a residential Substance Use Disorder treatment center.²⁹

A County Government investment in construction funding for Sheppard Pratt’s outpatient, medical, mental health and substance abuse disorder facility.³⁰

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation:
Implement new outreach targeting bullying

- In July 2019, HCPSS met with the community to discuss ways to combat bullying.³¹
- County Government’s “[It’s OK to Ask](#)” Campaign targets cyberbullying.
- Maryland’s antibullying law was strengthened in 2019 to address the changing digital landscape. The law makes misuse of internet-based communications with the intent to intimidate or harass a minor, a criminal offense; and prohibits electronic communications or conduct that may

cause physical or emotional distress, including inducing a minor to commit suicide. It also prohibits electronic conduct that has malicious intent. A person who is found guilty of violating this law is subject to criminal penalty.³²



²⁹ County Executive Ball Hosts Ribbon Cutting For Howard House To Fight Opioid Epidemic (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 2, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-hosts-ribbon-cutting-howard-house-fight-opioid-epidemic>

³⁰ County Executive Ball Releases Fiscal Year 2020 Operating Budget (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (April 18, 2019). Retrieved from

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/budget/county-executive-ball-releases-fiscal-year-2020-operating-budget>

³¹ Community Forum on Bullying, July 9, 2019 (News Release), Howard County Public School System. (June 19, 2019). Retrieved from <https://news.hcpss.org/news-posts/2019/06/community-forum-on-bullying-july-9-2019/>

³² See http://lems.hcpss.org/sites/default/files/library/GracesLaw_AgendaBkPage.pdf

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Adhere to IDEA

Beyond the information that is publicly available, the Commission has no specific information regarding this recommendation. In addition to the measures we noted earlier regarding DSE's report to the Howard County Board of Education, the Commission notes the following measure that promotes fidelity to the spirit of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:³³

Enactment of legislation establishing the Special Education Ombudsman in the Office of the Attorney General. The Ombudsman will serve as a resource for information and support to parents, students, and educators regarding special education rights and services.³⁴

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Strengthen the transition process

On August 21, 2019, the County Executive signed a Memorandum of Understanding, extending Project SEARCH to 2022.³⁵

The Howard County Transition Outreach Partnership³⁶ hosted a November 9, 2019 Transition Symposium. Approximately one hundred and thirty transition-age students with disabilities, parents, families, and professionals attended the symposium.

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendations: Address interpreter needs

The recommendation pertains to accommodating students and families with American Sign Language (ASL) and Limited English Proficiency needs.



County Government provides effective communication services for qualified individuals with disabilities.



HCPSS' Office of International Student and Family Services (OISFS) provides educational services to international students and to students and families who do not speak English proficiently.³⁷



³³ Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004)

³⁴ MD. State Government Code Ann. § 6-502 (2020)

³⁵ Project SEARCH is a one-year program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their last year of high school. The program helps students gain employment and marketable work skills through an internship with Howard County government.

³⁶ The Howard County Transition Outreach Partnership is a collaboration between Howard County Government, HCPSS, the Autism Society, Accessible Resources for Independence, Howard County Health Department Bureau of Behavioral Health, NAMI Howard County, and The Arc of Howard County.

³⁷ See <https://www.hcpss.org/languages/>



According to HCPSS’ website, most students who are deaf and hard of hearing receive services in their home school from an itinerant teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and when appropriate, an educational interpreter is provided.³⁸



In the Fiscal Year 2020 Staffing Plan, DSE reported that educational interpreters are provided to students who are deaf or hard of hearing to facilitate instruction and communication between student, teacher, and peers. The Staffing Plan also said that interpreters are assigned on a 1:1 basis, in accordance with a student’s IEP and assessment by a hearing services team. Classroom materials are modified when needed, and the teacher is assisted in conveying the lesson in the most appropriate mode for the student. Additionally, interpreter services are provided for extracurricular activities and parent conferences and meetings. Interpreter caseloads are established based on the needs identified in the IEP with consideration for planning, travel time, and, meetings.³⁹



The Staffing Plan reported that the FY20 operating budget provided for 12 education interpreters and 3 hearing impaired teachers.⁴⁰



CR 23-2018 Report
Recommendation: ASL – Expand language course options and peer relationship opportunities

In its report, the Commission recommended expanding

language course to include an option to learn ASL in addition to other foreign languages. The Commission also recommended increasing the number of ASL instructors, with a focus on hiring deaf ASL instructors. According to HCPSS’ web pages, ASL is available as a language option, subject to student interest and availability of highly qualified teachers.⁴¹

³⁸ See <https://www.hcpss.org/special-education/programs/>

³⁹ HCPSS Special Education Staffing Plan FY 2020, Howard County Public School System. (March 20, 2019), p.12. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/special-ed-staffing-plan.pdf>

⁴⁰ HCPSS Special Education Staffing Plan FY 2020, Howard County Public School System. (March 20, 2019), p.12. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpss.org/f/special/special-ed-staffing-plan.pdf>

⁴¹ See <https://www.hcpss.org/academics/world-language-program/high-school/fag/>






CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Create a disability awareness/education campaign HCPSS activities⁴²

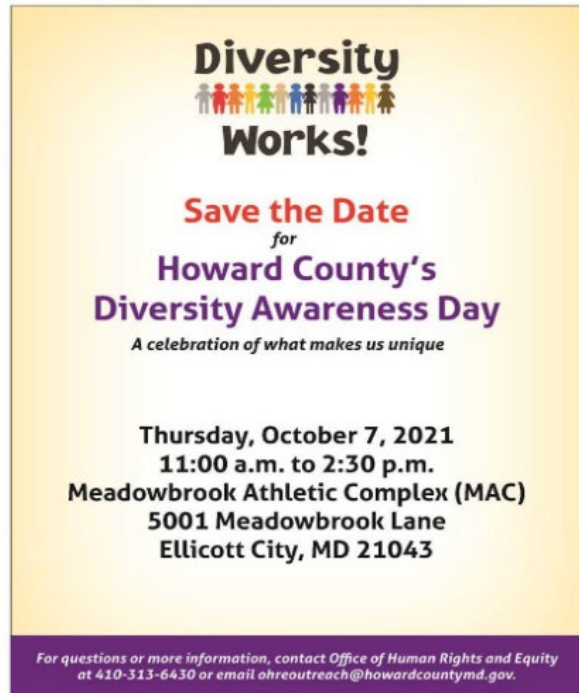
-  Middle School Girls' Group
-  Expansion of Best Buddies
-  Awareness of Differences Program
-  Inclusive Schools Week

-  DSE "Safety Care Basics"
-  Down Syndrome Awareness Month
-  Howard County Autism Society 5K run

-  Virtual Parent Empowerment Conference
-  Playground Communication Board
-  World Autism Month

County Government and Commission on Disabilities' disability awareness/education activities

-  Autism Awareness Day
-  Employee Diversity Day
-  Development of an ADA Overview and Disability Awareness training for County employees
-  National Disability Employment Awareness Month
-  ADA30 Art Contest



Diversity Works!

Save the Date
for
Howard County's Diversity Awareness Day
A celebration of what makes us unique

Thursday, October 7, 2021
11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Meadowbrook Athletic Complex (MAC)
5001 Meadowbrook Lane
Ellicott City, MD 21043

For questions or more information, contact Office of Human Rights and Equity at 410-313-6430 or email ohreoutreach@howardcountymd.gov.

⁴² Information in this section was taken from the Special education Board Report, supra, footnote 12, and various HCPSS social media sites.

EMPLOYMENT

CR 23-2018 Report

Recommendation: Consider employer outreach

✓ The Office of Workforce Development served a total of 126 adult participants who self-identified as having a disability for the reporting period 2019 to 2021.⁴³



CR 23-2018 Report

Recommendation: Expand Project SEARCH and other HCPSS work experience programs for students with disabilities

✓ In School Year 2018-2019, there were 24 Project SEARCH worksites. In School Year 2019-2020, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 15 County Government worksites engaged in mentoring a Project SEARCH student.⁴⁴

✓ The County Executive signed an MOU, extending Project SEARCH to 2022.⁴⁵

✓ County Government supported Career Exploration Day, an annual job shadowing event for high school students with disabilities, by providing worksite placements. On January 29, 2020, County Executive Ball invited his cabinet members and their departments to mentor students, while stressing the importance of mentorship.⁴⁶ More than 40 students expressed interest in participating and 20 County Government offices confirmed their willingness to mentor one or more students. Unfortunately, the April 22, 2020 event was cancelled due to school closure and COVID-19 restrictions.

⁴³ Information received from the Howard County Office of Workforce Development on February 25, 2022.

⁴⁴ Information obtained from an email communication, dated July 16, 2020. from Project SEARCH staff.

⁴⁵ *County Executive Ball Signs MOU For Project SEARCH* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 22, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-signs-mou-project-search>

⁴⁶ Based on email communication, dated January 29, 2020, from Howard County Executive Calvin Ball and sent to County department directors and office administrators, obtained from the Office of Workforce Development on January 29, 2020.

✓ In October 2021, County Government ran a series of videos to spotlight County employees with disclosed disabilities for National Disability Employment Awareness Month⁴⁷ and to encourage County participation in Project Search.⁴⁸

✓ The Office of Workforce Development operates a “Youth Services” program. Eligibility includes youth with IEP’s and 504 plans. From 2019 to 2021, a total of 67 participants self-identified as having an IEP and another 40 self-identified as having a Section 504 plan.⁴⁹

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Expand apprenticeship opportunities

The Commission recommended in its report, expanding apprenticeship opportunities to students with disabilities, including those who are on track to graduate with a high school diploma as well as those on track to exit the school system with a certificate of completion.

✓ During the three most recent academic calendar years, a total of 58 HCPSS students participated in apprenticeship programs and 16 of those 58 students had 504 plans or IEPs.⁵⁰

✓ Plans were announced to fund in 2019, an apprenticeship program in electrical, plumbing, and HVAC-R jobs in County Government.⁵¹



⁴⁷ Howard County Executive Calvin Ball [Facebook], *Celebrating our Employees* [Video], posted October 18, 2021. Retrieved March 21, 2022 from https://m.facebook.com/HoCoGovExec/videos/celebrating-our-employees/826373934711004/?so=permalink&rv=related_videos&locale=hi_IN&rdr

⁴⁸ Howard County Executive Calvin Ball [Facebook], *Celebrating our Employees* [Video], posted October 27, 2021. Retrieved March 21, 2022 from <https://www.facebook.com/HoCoGovExec/videos/celebrating-our-employees-gian-miller/672414320389291/>

⁴⁹ Information received from the Howard County Office of Workforce Development on February 25, 2022.

⁵⁰ Information received from the HCPSS Office of Career and Technical Education on February 1, 2022.

⁵¹ Trade apprenticeship program announced by Howard County Government, beginning in 2019, WMAR 2 News, *Posted at 12:19 PM, Aug 09, 2018*. See <https://www.wmar2news.com/news/region/howard-county/trade-apprenticeship-program-announced-by-howard-county-government-beginning-in-2019>

- ✓ The Office of Workforce Development hosted events to promote apprenticeship opportunities in August 2019,⁵² August 2020,⁵³ November 2020, and June 2021.⁵⁴
- ✓ In November 2021, County Executive Calvin Ball recognized National Apprenticeship Week by meeting with community partners who run apprenticeship programs in the County.⁵⁵
- ✓ In February 2022, the Office of Human Resources began accepting applications for electricians in the County's Apprenticeship Program. The four-year program provides 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and paid tuition to a trade school in exchange for a commitment to remain employed with County Government for at least two years after completion of the program.⁵⁶



County Executive Calvin Ball and community partners who provide apprenticeships

⁵² *Howard County to Hold 'Apprenticeship Day' For Jobseekers* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (July 31, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/administration/howard-county-hold-apprenticeship-day-jobseekers>

⁵³ *County Executive Ball Presents: The Ball Bulletin* (Weekly Newsletter), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 10, 2020). Retrieved from <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Low-Positivity-Rates--High-Vigilance.html?soid=1132235439076&aid=fJNEmj7NXU>


⁵⁴ Information received from the Howard County Office of Workforce Development on February 25, 2022.


⁵⁵ *County Executive Ball Presents: The Ball Bulletin* (Weekly Newsletter), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 22, 2021). Retrieved from <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Taking-Care-of-Our-Youth.html?soid=1132235439076&aid=-lhuHnNtvTs>


⁵⁶ *County Executive Ball Presents: The Ball Bulletin* (Weekly Newsletter), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (February 22, 2022). Retrieved from https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Praises-from-the-President.html?soid=1132235439076&aid=t_MT-OKT-BE


HOUSING

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Implement Housing Plan

 In October 2019, the County Executive announced a Housing Opportunities Master Plan process and signed an Executive Order to form a Housing Opportunities Master Plan Task Force.⁵⁷

 On June 17, 2020, County Government released a public survey to gather community comments and feedback for use in the development of a Housing Opportunities Master Plan.⁵⁸

 In May 2021, the County Executive announced the release of the completed Housing Opportunities Master Plan.⁵⁹ Several recommendations were made that would benefit low-income renters and persons with disabilities, including the establishment of a Housing Opportunities Trust Fund to create and preserve low and moderate income housing.

 The County Executive's Fiscal Year 2022 proposed operating budget included \$5 million towards the establishment of a Housing Opportunities Trust Fund.⁶⁰




County Executive Calvin Ball announces completed Housing Opportunities Master Plan


⁵⁷ *County Executive Calvin Ball Announces New Housing Master Plan, Task Force* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (October 30, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/housing-community-development/county-executive-calvin-ball-announces-new-housing-master-plan-task>

⁵⁸ *Howard County Launches Housing Opportunities Master Plan Public Survey* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (June 17, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/housing-community-development/howard-county-launches-housing-opportunities-master-plan-public>


⁵⁹ *Howard County Executive Unveils Housing Opportunities Master Plan, Outlines New Affordable Housing Initiatives* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 18, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Howard-County-Executive-Unveils-Housing-Opportunities-Master-Plan-Outlines-New-Affordable-Housing-Initiatives>

⁶⁰ *Howard County Executive Unveils Housing Opportunities Master Plan, Outlines New Affordable Housing Initiatives* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 18, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Howard-County-Executive-Unveils-Housing-Opportunities-Master-Plan-Outlines-New-Affordable-Housing-Initiatives>


 The Reinvest*Renovate*Restore Housing Repair Loan Program⁶¹ is available through the Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development to income-eligible homeowners for repairs that enhance safety, accessibility and livability in their homes.⁶²


 The Department of Housing and Community Development also processes applications for the state’s Housing Repair Loan Programs. Applicants who are ineligible based on income or credit for either program are referred to the non-profit Rebuilding Together for assistance.

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Increase availability of rent subsidies for people with extremely low incomes, including people with disabilities

 Council Bill No. 50-2019⁶³, which took effect on January 6, 2020, amends the Moderate Income Housing Unit Code and provides for Disability Income Housing Units as an optional method of providing moderate income housing units in certain instances; provides that the fee in lieu can be used for grants to the Housing Commission or local nonprofits; and establishes rental rates for Disability Incoming Housing Units based on monthly income of persons with disabilities with income below 20% of the Howard County median.



 The Robinson Overlook Project PILOT (Council Resolution 97-2019) supports inclusion in the project of eight housing units designated for persons with disabilities whose income is at or below 50% of the Area Median Income (“AMI”) of the Baltimore Metropolitan Statistical Area.⁶⁴

 Patuxent Commons⁶⁵ is an initiative spearheaded by the Howard County Autism Society and based on a multi-generational, intentional housing model where residents are mutually supportive of each other.⁶⁶ Twenty-five percent of the units will be designated for low-income individuals with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

⁶¹ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/RRR%20Program%20description%20%26%20income%20-%202021.pdf>

⁶² See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/DHCD-RRR>


⁶³ See <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/olis/LegislationDetail.aspx?LegislationID=12355>


⁶⁴ See <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/olis/LegislationDetail.aspx?LegislationID=12297>


⁶⁵ For more information about Patuxent Commons, see: <https://www.patuxentcommons.com/>

⁶⁶ See: [County Executive Calvin Ball’s Testimony in Support: Ho. Co. 17-21 – Patuxent Commons, which would establish funding to support the construction and equipping of Patuxent Commons. November 17, 2020](#)

Development (HUD) has awarded Patuxent Commons a grant of \$2.47 million, and Howard County Government has committed \$2 million of County funds to this project.⁶⁷

 In August 2019, the County Executive signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the Downtown Columbia Plan, the “Live Where You Work” program, which was created through a Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement (DRRA) for affordable housing between the County and The Howard Hughes Corporation.⁶⁸ Under the new program, selected Howard County General Hospital workers will receive subsidies that will reduce for them the cost of rental apartments in Downtown Columbia. The subsidies are provided jointly by the hospital and the housing corporation and paid to eligible landlords in the Downtown Columbia district. Selected hospital employees must have household income that falls within the low- or moderate-income guideline limits established by the Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development. Employees participating in the program will not be spending more than 30 percent of their household income on rent and the subsidies will be in place for a maximum of three years.

 The County Executive provided Testimony of Support in favor of Ho. Co. 33-20, to establish funding for Living in Recovery Inc. to assist with the down payment on a new safe and affordable living quarters for 18 residents recovering from substance use disorder. The measure was passed by the Maryland General Assembly on 1/15/20, with \$75000 in funding.

 The Housing Commission is investing in low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) funds in the redevelopment of Downtown Columbia to provide affordable housing opportunities to low income households. The County and Columbia Downtown Housing Corporation are requiring market rate developers to provide a percentage of affordable units to low and very low-income households.⁶⁹





⁶⁷ *Howard County Project Awarded \$2.5 Million HUD Grant for Unique Affordable Housing for People with Disabilities* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (December 9, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/housing-community-development/howard-county-project-awarded-25-million-hud-grant-unique-affordable>




⁶⁸ *County Executive Ball Holds MOU Signing For New ‘Live Where You Work’ Affordable Housing Program* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 14, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-holds-mou-signing-new-live-where-you-work-affordable-housing>

⁶⁹ See: *Final Report, 2020 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in the Baltimore Region*, p. 46, https://www.baltometro.org/sites/default/files/bmc_documents/general/community/analysis-to-impediments/2020_RegionalAI_final.pdf

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Create education campaign for landlords/tenants

-  In Spring 2019, the Howard County Office of Human Rights, the Howard County Housing Commission and the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights hosted a two-part Fair Housing Training for property and leasing managers, as well as other housing professionals.
 -  In October 2019, the Howard County Office of Human Rights trained members of the Howard County Association of Realtors on Howard County's Fair Housing Law.
-

CR 23-2018 Recommendation: Provide home modification and assistive technology funding for low-income renters

-  County Government's Community Services Partnership Grant program provides funding to non-profit organizations for the delivery of human services to County residents.⁷⁰
 -  The CDBG and HOME programs provide funds that enable Howard County and local organizations to carry out a variety of housing and community development activities intended to principally benefit low and moderate-income residents. The County is working to preserve and retain the affordable housing stock through housing rehabilitation projects and increase the availability of affordable, permanent housing for persons with disabilities, special needs populations and working families earning between 30-60% AMI. To encourage homeownership, the County is providing access to down payment to assistance to make the home purchases more affordable.⁷¹
 -  112 low-income renters received home modification services through the Community Living Program within the Howard County Office on Aging and Independence, from November 2019 to June 2021.⁷²
-




⁷⁰ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/community-partnerships/community-service-partnership-grants-program>


⁷¹ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/housing-community-development>


⁷² Information received from the Office on Aging and Independence's Community Living Program on January 26, 2022.

PEER RELATIONS

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Assess capacity of existing county government programs

 In April 2021, two innovative nonverbal communication boards were unveiled at Blandair Park's Play for All playground.⁷³ The communication boards, which were partially funded by the Howard County Autism Society, allow children who are nonverbal to easily communicate without the use of personal assistive technology devices.

 In November 2021, a new inclusive playground opened at Savage Park.⁷⁴ The playground features a nonverbal communication board as well as other equipment to promote interactions and communication. Two new musical stations are accessible to children using mobility devices. Savage Park improvements also include new sidewalks flush with the parking lot for increased accessibility.

 November 2021 also marked the opening of Centennial Park's Sensory-Friendly Play Experience playground, featuring equipment designed to promote inclusion social and interaction, and to be accessible to park users of all abilities. The addition of a sensory trail is also planned for Centennial Park, set to open summer 2022.⁷⁵




Images of new sensory-friendly playground


⁷³ *Howard County Unveils Two Innovative Nonverbal Communication Boards at Blandair Park Playground* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (April 16, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News041621>

⁷⁴ *Howard County Unveils New, Inclusive Playground at Savage Park* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 4, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News110521>


⁷⁵ *New Sensory-Friendly Play Experience Opens at Centennial Park in Howard County, Next Phase Announced* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (November 8, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News1108221b>


CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Review County-owned or operated facilities for accessibility


 In October 2021, improvements to Centennial Park South were announced.⁷⁶ These include an ADA-accessible parking facility as well as accessible pathways.


 In December 2020, work was completed at South Branch Park which included parking lot, sidewalk, and lighting improvements.⁷⁷

CR 23-2018 Recommendation: Consider legislation to require adult changing tables

 The Department of Public Works has been studying this issue and at the time of this writing, discussions were underway regarding specifications for adult changing tables.

 In November 2019, the Horizon Foundation and United Way of Central Maryland, as part of the Changemaker Challenge for social change contest, awarded The Arc of Howard County \$15,000.00 for their “Community Accessibility with Dignity” proposal.⁷⁸ The grant is expected to be used to fund adult changing tables.

 As part of its building renovation, Humanim plans to add an adult changing table.⁷⁹

 Maryland State Senate Bill 61/House Bill 321 was passed in Spring 2021 which requires adult changing facilities in certain State and



County Executive Calvin Ball and dignitaries at new courthouse ribbon-cutting

⁷⁶ *Howard County Making Centennial Park More ADA Accessible* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (October 6, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News100621e>

⁷⁷ *South Branch Park Improvements Completed* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (December 1, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/recreation-parks/south-branch-park-improvements-completed>

⁷⁸ *Congratulations, 2019 Changemaker Challenge Winners!* (News Release), Horizon Foundation. (November 13, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.thehorizonfoundation.org/congratulations-2019-changemaker-challenge-winners/>

⁷⁹ See [County Executive Ball’s Testimony in Support of Ho. Co. 16-21 – Humanim – Remodeling Gerwig](#).

County buildings newly constructed or undergoing substantial renovation on or after October 1, 2022.⁸⁰



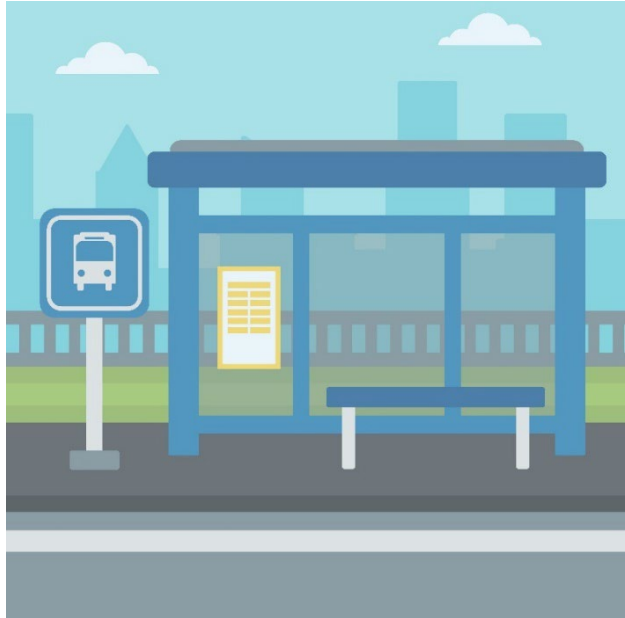
The new circuit courthouse⁸¹ includes a restroom with an adult changing table.

TRANSPORTATION

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation:
Implement TDP fixed-route recommendations



Enhancements were made to the RTA fixed route service, effective May 5, 2019. Schedules were adjusted to shorten the wait times between bus runs and eliminate two-hour frequencies; all buses began operating on 30 or 60-minute intervals. In addition, 5,600 new service hours added to Howard County routes, including three new routes and expanded service on Sunday routes. Residents over 60 years old and those with disabilities continue to be eligible to ride fixed-route buses for free, system wide. The transit app *RouteShout 2.0* allows users to see personalized bus arrival and departure times by route, address, or location.⁸²



Approval of Fiscal Year 2020 funding for implementation of the first phase of the Consolidated Transit Plan's recommendations, including a major reconfiguration of the county's bus routes with a focus on more frequent service, shorter trip times and expanded Sunday service.⁸³

⁸⁰ See <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/site/Legislation/Details/sb0061/?ys=2021rs>

⁸¹ *Howard County Officials Unveil New Circuit Courthouse* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (July 13, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News071321>

⁸² *County Executive Ball Holds Press Conference on Transportation Vision* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 7, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/transportation/county-executive-ball-holds-press-conference-transportation-vision>

⁸³ *Howard County Budget Adopted With Record School Funding, Public Safety Enhancements, and Transportation Improvements* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 29, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/budget/howard-county-budget-adopted-record-school-funding-public-safety-enhancements-and>



In March 2021, a new mobile ticketing option was introduced which allows RTA riders the ability to plan, track, and pay for their transit trips using one technology platform.⁸⁴ This increases ease-of-use and convenience, thus making public transit a more attractive option.



In August 2021, HCPSS partnered with County Government and RTA to offer free fixed-route bus passes, expiring in September 2022, to all HCPSS middle and high school students.⁸⁵ This partnership has the potential to introduce more than 57,000 students to Howard County’s fixed route bus system. Trips are free-of-charge and are not limited to school-related trip purposes. Through this initiative, 535 HCPSS middle and high school students have received bus passes as of March 22, 2022.⁸⁶

Howard County Offers Free RTA Bus Passes to Middle and High School Students
More than 57,000 students can now ride the RTA system and more than 10,000 students can access a stop within a quarter mile of their school



CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Fund and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of facilities in the public-right-of-way (PROW) and transition plan



The December 2019 [WalkHoward](#) Plan provides a review of certain PROW elements along with priority and funding recommendations.⁸⁷ It may be used as a partial evaluation of elements in the public-right-of-way. The WalkHoward Plan was adopted by the County Council in February 2020.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ *Howard County Executive Announces New Mobile Ticketing is Now Available for RTA Riders* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (March 24, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News032421b>

⁸⁵ *Howard County Offers Free RTA Bus Passes to Middle and High School Students* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 25, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News082521>

⁸⁶ Information received from the Howard County Public School System’s Office of Program Innovation and Student Well-Being on March 22, 2022.

⁸⁷ To view the full WalkHoward Plan and an online interactive map of all recommendations, see www.walkhoward.org

⁸⁸ *County Council Adopts Updated WalkHoward Plan* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (February 5, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/transportation/county-council-adopts-updated-walkhoward-plan>

The plan provides a connected, comfortable and safe pedestrian network that accommodates all users.



Steps have been taken to implement the Transit Funding Study recommendations. Those steps include October 2019 legislative approval of the County's [Complete Streets](#) Policy.⁸⁹ August 2019 marked the opening of the HCC Connector.⁹⁰



Starting in 2021 and as part of the Complete Streets program, improvements were begun to improve safety and pedestrian access. These included the Guilford-Oakland Mills Road intersection,⁹¹ Baltimore Street in Savage,⁹² and Snowden River Parkway.⁹³



In Fiscal Year 2021, the Office of Transportation advanced Complete Streets Policy with the creation of a Transportation Project Prioritization System), a set of Complete Streets Performance Measures, and a Community Engagement Plan.⁹⁴ The Office of Transportation also completed 30% design plans for pedestrian and bicycle improvements for the Clarksville / River Hill Streetscape.⁹⁵



Creation of a permit policy⁹⁶ that recognizes the importance of maintaining safety and accessibility of pedestrian facilities and regulates shared electric scooter providers.

⁸⁹ *Howard County Council Unanimously Approves County Executive Ball's "Complete Streets" Resolution* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (October 8, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/howard-county-council-unanimously-approves-county-executive-balls-complete-streets>

⁹⁰ *County Executive Ball Opens HCC Connector, Announces New 'Complete Streets' Policy* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 23, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/transportation/county-executive-ball-opens-hcc-connector-announces-new-complete-streets-policy>

⁹¹ *Transformative Complete Streets Improvements Coming to Guilford-Oakland Mills Road Intersection* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 11, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News081121>

⁹² *Baltimore Street Improvements to Begin* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (August 18, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News081821>

⁹³ Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (March 7, 2022) *Snowden River Parkway Sidewalk Extension Project to Begin* (News Release). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News030722>

⁹⁴ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/transportation/complete-streets-implementation>

⁹⁵ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/transportation/clarksville-river-hill-streetscape-improvement-project>

⁹⁶ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/media/2020-10/HC%20Scooter%20Permit%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%2010-21-20.pdf>



In January 2022, Howard County received AARP approval of the Age-Friendly Action Plan.⁹⁷ The report includes 80 recommendations across eight domains which impact the quality of life for residents, including outdoor spaces and buildings, and transportation.



GRANTS PROGRAMS

CR 23-2018 Report Recommendation: Fund innovative employment, housing, social programs and transportation initiatives

The *CR 23-2018 Report* recommended that County Government, using needs-based criteria that are tied to County Government’s priorities, award grants to fund new, innovative programs that address identified gaps in employment, housing, social programs and transportation for individuals with disabilities.



In February 2020, the County Executive launched the Innovation Grants award program, which awarded eight grantees a total of \$225,000. In October 2021, the County Executive announced an increase to

\$500,000 in grant funding under the program, for non-profits to design and implement forward-thinking, emerging, and creative ideas to support the community.⁹⁸ These grants, in amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000, provide an opportunity for non-profit service providers and their partners to design and implement forward-thinking, emerging, and creative ideas derived from data-informed, people-driven metrics to build the County’s service capacity in five specific categories. The categories are digital access, youth education



⁹⁷ *Transformational Howard County Age Friendly Action Plan Approved by AARP* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (January 25, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News012522>

⁹⁸ *County Executive Ball Launches Applications for \$500,000 in Transform Howard Innovation Grants* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (October 22, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News102221b>

and empowerment, healthy and thriving residents, cybersecurity, and environmental sustainability.⁹⁹



The Innovation Fund awarded a grant to the Howard County Autism Society in March 2020 to pilot an autism hiring program with the goal of expanding employment opportunities for individuals with autism and connecting local businesses to a competent, capable workforce.¹⁰⁰



The Department of Community Resources and Services received an Innovation Grant award for Translate Live's Instant Language Assistant Professional (ILA Pro), a real-time interpretation device that facilitates in-person and remote communication for people with differing abilities and languages.¹⁰¹

The infographic is a light gray rounded rectangle containing three sections. Each section has an icon at the top, a title, and a list of features. The 'Deaf/Hard of Hearing' section has an orange icon of a hand and a blue icon of an ear. The 'Deaf/Blind' section has a green icon of a circle with four dots. The 'Blind/Low Vision' section has a pink icon of an eye with a slash through it.

Category	Features
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instant speech-to-text in any language• Ability to have access to Live Sign Language Interpreters• Ability to make calls on ILA using: TTY, VRS, VRI, IPCTS & IP Relay Calls• With added keyboard, doorbell flasher & buzzer, ILA becomes the next generation of ADA kits for hospitality.
Deaf/Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For users with braille reader/writers, ILA can be used to communicate in person and remotely.
Blind/Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to reach video assistance personnel• Interchangeable background, text color & size• Instant text-to-speech

⁹⁹ For information about The Transform Howard Innovation Grants, grant recipients, innovation summaries and outcomes, see <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/innovation-grants#:~:text=Transform%20Howard%20innovation%20grants%20provide.capacity%20for%20serving%20our%20neighbors.>

¹⁰⁰ *County Executive Calvin Ball Celebrates First 'Innovation Week'* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (February 28, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-calvin-ball-celebrates-first-innovation-week>

¹⁰¹ *County Executive Calvin Ball Celebrates First 'Innovation Week'* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (February 28, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-calvin-ball-celebrates-first-innovation-week>



In July 2021, the Office of Community Partnerships released its Community Service Partnership Grant Report,¹⁰² highlighting changes to its revamped Community Services Partnership Grant Program (CSP).

Community Services Grants Program Strategic Framework 2021-2026

Partnering with Nonprofits to Support a Thriving Howard County

Since 1974, Howard County Government has been committed to investing in the nonprofit sector to deliver critical human services through the Community Services Partnership (CSP) Grant Program. CSP has grown significantly since its inception, from 5 grantees and a total award of \$128,000 to 46 grantees and a total award of \$8.4 million in FY20.

In early 2020, after 45 years of administering CSP grants, the Office of Community Partnerships engaged over 260 diverse constituents to create a nimble, high-impact grant program that responds to the changing needs, challenges, and opportunities facing Howard County. Rooted in measurable outcomes and collaboration, the redesigned grant program targets investments in nonprofits that equitably and effectively deliver programs and support to individuals and families in Howard County who lack adequate resources or are facing financial hardships.

Addressing Emerging and Changing Needs

After months of data analysis, input gathering and discussions with local community leaders, the Office of Community Partnerships has determined that it will distribute all of its CSP grant dollars to the following areas of focus:

- **BASIC HUMAN NEEDS** — Equitably and collaboratively addressing the basic needs of Howard County residents to eliminate barriers to longer-term well-being, safety and security
- **SAFETY AND SECURITY** — Building the foundation for all residents to equitably access opportunities by investing in resources individuals need to grow and thrive

To measure impact, each area of focus has a series of Progress Indicators to help guide the assessment of our collective progress and inform program and agency-level performance. You can see the full list of indicators in our Community Services Partnership Grant Program report at www.howardcountymd.gov/OCP.



To learn more, visit our website at www.howardcountymd.gov/OCP or contact Megan Godfrey Jackson, CSP Program Manager, at mgodfrey@howardcountymd.gov.

Investing in Three Grant Types

In alignment with the two funding areas of focus, CSP grants will be awarded through the following grant types:

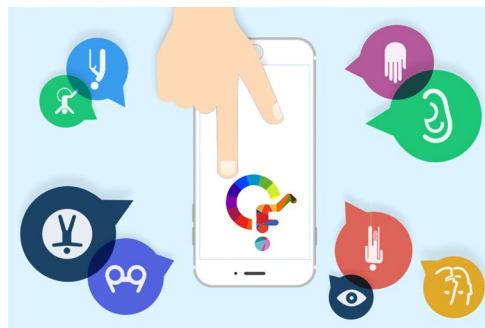
- **CORE SUPPORT GRANTS**
Supports day-to-day operations and long-term organizational sustainability. For the first time, multi-year funding may be requested for up to three years.
- **PROGRAM SUPPORT GRANTS**
 - **Safety, Security and Wellbeing Grants** — supports a specific program within an organization to address Basic Human Needs and/or Safety and Security
 - **Human Service Transportation Grants** — funds transportation services for adults with disabilities to access employment, health care and social services
 - **Plan to End Homelessness (PEH) Grants** — supports priority services under the [Howard County Plan to End Homelessness](#)
- **EMERGING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITY GRANTS**
One-time grants for needs that emerge unexpectedly and impact the delivery of critical human services, and support:
 - **Emergency Needs** — provides financial resources to maintain service delivery in the event of an emergency, crisis or natural disaster
 - **Capacity-building** — improves an organization's effectiveness for measurable impact by strengthening management and governance, planning, processes, and infrastructure
 - **Collective Impact** — to design, build and manage collaborations between and among relevant sectors and organizations/entities to equitably address complex community challenges

¹⁰² Community Services Partnership Grant Program, July 2021. See: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/HC%20CSP%20Redesign%20Report%20Final.pdf>

WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY

CR 23-2018 Recommendation: Ensure website accessibility

In all 5 areas studied, the Commission recommended website accessibility.



- HCPSS has a Website Accessibility Policy.¹⁰³
- In June 2019¹⁰⁴ and again in September 2020¹⁰⁵, the County Executive released public surveys to solicit feedback on the County’s website.
- The Commission met with the Department of Technology and Communication Services (DTCS) on October 28, 2019 and provided input for an accessible website.¹⁰⁶
- DTCS solicited and received input from the Office of ADA Coordination on the accessibility criteria to be included in the RFP for redevelopment of the County’s website.¹⁰⁷
- Through the Office of Purchasing’s RFP process, the County entered into an agreement for Website Redevelopment services. The agreement specified WCAG 2.1 AA Compliance to help ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities.¹⁰⁸
- In May 2021, the County unveiled its new website¹⁰⁹ which follows key Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) level 2.1. Both automated and manual testing of the website was completed utilizing various assistive technologies.
- County Government has an updated Website Accessibility Statement which includes a process for individuals with disabilities to notify County Government of any difficulty in

¹⁰³ See <https://www.hcpss.org/inclusivity/#accessibility>

¹⁰⁴ *County Executive Ball Seeks Public Feedback to Improve County Website* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (June 27, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/county-executive-ball-seeks-public-feedback-improve-county-website>

¹⁰⁵ *County Executive Ball Seeks Input to Improve County Website* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (September 8, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/technology-communication-services/county-executive-ball-seeks-input-improve-county-website>

¹⁰⁶ *Meeting Minutes* (October 28, 2019), Howard County Commission on Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/minutes%20October%2028%2C%202019%20%281%29.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Based on email communication, dated August 16, 2019, from the Office of ADA Coordination and sent to the Department of Technology and Communication Services.

¹⁰⁸ Based on information contained in the complete Contract Agreement PA-062-2020 Taoti Enterprises, Inc. DBA Taoti Creative, obtained from the Office of Purchasing on June 22, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ *Howard County Executive Launches Digital Equity Initiative, Unveils New County Website* (News Release), Howard County Government, Office of Public Information. (May 24, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/News052421>

accessing information on the website.¹¹⁰ Notification options include phone call, email, or an online form.

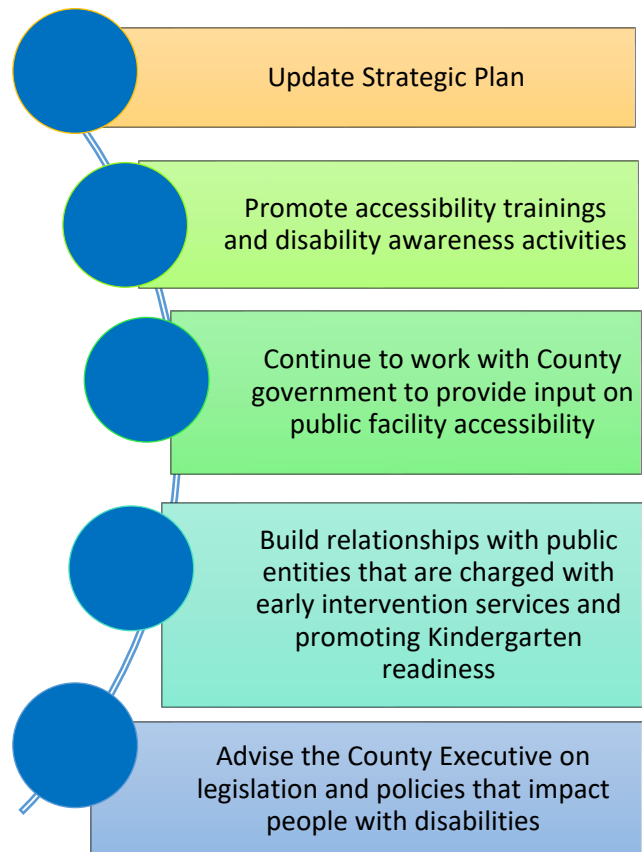
THE COMMISSION'S FIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2022-23

The Commission's priorities for calendar year 2022-23 are to update its strategic plan; and collaborate with County government on training and other awareness-enhancing activities.

To provide input on accessibility and ease-of-use by people with disabilities, the Commission's priorities include seeking opportunities to be an early part of the planning and approval process of County government's new construction and renovation projects.

The Maryland State Department of Education reported that in 2021–2022, children with disabilities continue to lag behind their non-disabled peers in all domains of learning.¹¹¹ Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)¹¹² results indicate a continued need to focus efforts on expanding access for children with disabilities.¹¹³ To support the educational rights of Howard County's youngest residents with disabilities, the Commission has included as a priority for the current calendar year, building relationships with government entities that are charged with providing early intervention services and promoting Kindergarten readiness.

Lastly, the Commission will continue to monitor legislative and policy activities that impact people with disabilities and advise the County Executive as necessary.



¹¹⁰ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/accessibility>

¹¹¹ 2021–2022 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report, Maryland State Department of Education, p.6.

¹¹² The KRA is a key tool for gathering information about students' progress. The KRA is one component of Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland's Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment System, a coordinated system for measuring the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of young children. There are two parts to R4K: • The Early Learning Assessment (ELA) was designed to measure the progress of young children across seven domains. This assessment tool is available at no cost to all licensed providers across the state. • The KRA is given to incoming kindergarteners in public schools. It uses observations of children's work and play, selected response items, and performance tasks to measure specific kindergarten readiness skills across four domains of learning: language and literacy, social foundations, mathematics, and physical well-being and motor development. *Ibid.*, p.2.


¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6





Ready and Successful Students | Safe and Engaged Communities
Clean and Sustainable Environment | Thriving and Healthy Residents
Reliable and Accessible Infrastructure | Strong and Prosperous Businesses

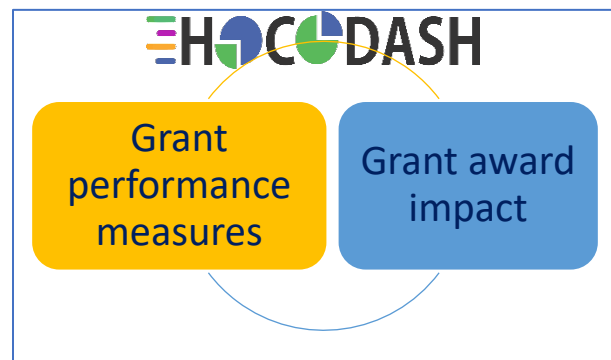
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission respectfully recommends that County government –

 Continue to implement the *CR 23-2018 Report* recommendations.

 Tie disability-related grant performance measures into the County’s policy priorities for ready and successful students, safe and engaged communities, clean and sustainable environment, thriving and healthy residents, reliable and accessible infrastructure and strong and prosperous businesses.

 Consider implementing a grant performance measurement and program evaluation system for grants that are designed to benefit people with disabilities. The measurement and evaluation system should capture and report impact in a manner that is similar to that which has been established and made public for the Innovation Grants Program.¹¹⁴



CONCLUSION

In spite of restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission remained engaged in advising County government and hosting public informational sessions. Students experienced academic regression during the pandemic and will continue to require supports that will allow them to make progress.

It is clear from *CR 23-2018 Report* recommendations highlighted in this document, that County Government has invested significant resources and has made progress in addressing identified gaps, especially in the areas of education, mental health, peer relations, and housing.

The Commission looks forward to continuing its work with the County to ensure an inclusive, accessible and welcoming community.

¹¹⁴ See <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/county-executive/innovation-grants#grant-categories>

ALTERNATE FORMAT

This document is available in alternate formats by request.
Please contact 410-313-6402 (voice/relay) or CoD@howardcountymd.gov



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