

Annual Report 2016

The Howard County Commission on Disability Issues



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In Memoriam: Commissioner Steve Rivers

Commissioner Steve Rivers passed away on July 20, 2016, following a period of illness. A graduate of New York University Law School, Steve worked for several years in the fields of law and finance. He was an active volunteer who believed in his civic duty to serve the community, and was passionate about serving on the Commission and the Commission's Access Committee. Steve played a leadership role in the Office on Aging and Independence's Living Well program. At the time of his death, Steve was serving his second five-year term as a Commissioner. The Commission is grateful for Steve's many and invaluable contributions. He will be missed.

The Commission on Disability Issues (Commission) was established by statute in 1988 to:

- Increase public awareness of issues impacting people with disabilities.
- Serve in an advisory capacity on County Government programs, policies, and budget.
- Promote compliance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 by providing guidance and recommendations to County Government.

Commissioners

Arthur Gold, Chair

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Status of People With Disabilities: Findings and Recommendations

The Commission remains focused on addressing barriers that prevent Howard County residents with disabilities from becoming full participants in their communities, and from enjoying the same rights and privileges available to all. Based on its work throughout the year, the Commission finds that:

1. Accessibility is critical to full participation in community living for people who have disabilities.



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires local government entities such as Howard County to take appropriate measures to ensure that their programs, services, activities, and facilities are non-discriminatory and accessible to individuals with disabilities.

This includes, but is not limited to, the County government's website, effective communication practices, emergency management, reasonable accommodations for employees, modifications to policies, procedures, and practices, building renovations, and pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops.

Universal design and accessibility features benefit all residents and create a welcoming community. For example, sidewalks with curb cuts not only provide much-needed access for individuals with mobility disabilities, but also provide ease-of-use for parents pushing strollers, delivery persons, participants in local walking health and wellness initiatives, and the County's growing older adult population.

Difficulties with mobility (walking or climbing stairs) were the most commonly reported disability for those age 65 and over in 2014 (17% of women and 11% of men).¹

14,432...the number of Howard County residents who have been issued disability plates or placards.² This represents 6.6% of county residents 20 years old and older.³



Universal design and accessibility features benefit the entire community by promoting productivity and increasing the quality of life.

The availability of accessible parking impacts individuals who have mobility issues and other disabilities. The misuse of accessible, reserved parking spaces intended for citizens with disabilities who possess the appropriate Motor Vehicle Administration-issued vehicle plate or placard continues to be an ongoing concern.

In addition, some local entities fail to provide the required accessible, reserved parking spaces and/or provide the parking spaces but fail to install proper, legally-enforceable signage for such spaces. Enforcement of applicable local, state, and federal building codes and mandates is essential, including monetary penalties imposed on those who fail to comply.

359,391...the total number of residents in Maryland with disability plates or placards as of mid-November 2016.⁴



The availability of accessible parking can help promote opportunities for individuals who have mobility issues.

There is no formal mechanism for the Commission to receive updates from County government, including the ability to review new planning and development and the creation or revision of County programs, policies, and procedures.

This impedes the Commission's ability to advise County government on matters that are relevant to individuals with disabilities.⁵

A formal mechanism is needed to facilitate communication between County government departments and the Commission. Such a mechanism would promote compliance and increased access for citizens with disabilities.



Communication between County government departments, the Commission, and an informed citizenry would help to promote increased access for citizens with disabilities.

As plans and policies that impact the lives of people with disabilities are developed, the Commission and the public should be afforded meaningful opportunity to provide input and feedback. In particular, this critical input and feedback should be obtained from citizens with disabilities and older adults, as well as those representing their interests.

Based on these findings, the Commission recommends that the County Executive and County Council:

- Continue to recognize the needs of citizens with disabilities and how laws and policy impact them.
- Encourage and support accessibility features.
- Increase compliance with parking space and signage requirements among business and commercial property owners; support enforcement activities consistent with such initiatives; and consider initiatives to increase public awareness of accessible parking.
- Assign liaisons from County government offices and departments, including the Office of Emergency Management, to provide periodic updates to, and obtain feedback from, the Commission.

“A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.”

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), poet and lexicographer.

2. Employment remains a critical concern for people who have disabilities and is essential to reducing the incidence of poverty.

Poverty disproportionately affects people who have disabilities and limits their options to housing, healthcare, transportation, and employment.

The Social Security Administration administers two federal income benefits programs, SSI and SSDI, for people who have disabilities. The payment levels, for SSI benefits in particular, barely provide for the most basic of needs. Recipients who rely solely on these benefits are at bottom of the economic ladder.



People who have disabilities are disproportionately affected by poverty.

A single individual whose sole income is from SSI receives a maximum of \$8,820.00 annually.⁶ This income is 8% of Howard County’s median household income of \$110,133.00.⁷



Poverty affects people with disabilities by limiting them in many areas of life.

A single individual whose sole income is from SSDI receives an estimated average annual payment of \$14,052.00.⁸

This represents 12.8% of Howard County’s median household income.



Promoting career opportunities for all citizens increases the quality of life for everyone.

Both the SSI and SSDI programs contain work incentives that allow benefit recipients to work, and in many cases retain, at least a portion of their benefits, including health insurance coverage.

Nationally, 28.1% of adults (ages 21 to 64) who have a disability live below the poverty line, compared to 12.2% of adults in the same age range who do not have a disability.

At the State level, 22.5% of Marylanders (ages 21 to 64) who have a disability live below the poverty line, compared to 7.9% of those who do not have a disability.⁹

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Employment benefits both the individual and the community.

Work provides economic benefits to the community – employment earnings increase income tax and other tax revenues, increase consumer spending power, and can reduce reliance on publicly-funded benefits.

Nationally, the labor force participation rate of non-institutionalized civilians age 16 and over who have a disability is 20%, compared to a labor force participation rate of 68.6% for the same age group who do not have a disability.¹⁰

A combination of factors including attitudinal barriers, low expectations, lack of education and training, lack of reliable transportation, and misperceptions regarding reasonable accommodations, all reduce employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities.

Job seekers with disabilities need expanded opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for jobs that pay a living wage and are in line with their interests and abilities.



Job seekers with disabilities possess valuable skills and abilities.

Based on these findings, the Commission recommends that the County Executive and the County Council:

- Create a non-competitive hiring authority for job seekers with disabilities who meet eligibility criteria. The authority could be similar to the Montgomery County government's program.¹¹



3. Housing remains scarce and unattainable for many people with disabilities, particularly those with extremely low incomes and those who need physically accessible units.

The Howard County Housing Choice Voucher rental subsidy (also referred to as “Section 8”) waiting list has been closed to new applicants since June 2012. As of June 2016, Howard County’s waiting list contained more than 5,000 families seeking housing subsidy assistance.¹²

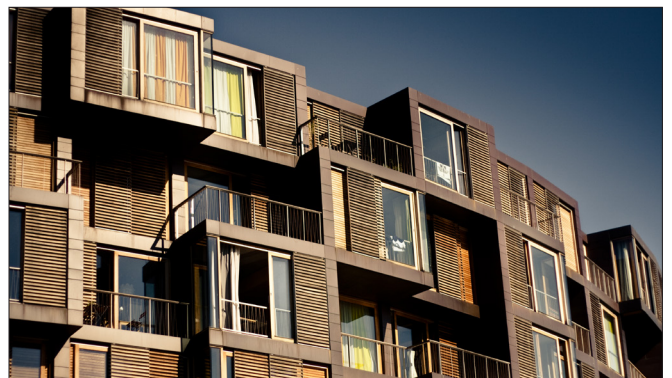
Data is not readily available regarding the breakdown of how many of the 5,000+ applicants have disabilities and how many applicants have extremely low incomes.

Unit-based subsidy programs exist in Howard County, but many of these have also closed their waiting lists or have established minimum income eligibility requirements that preclude participation by individuals and families living in poverty.

A single adult with a disability whose sole income is from SSI or SSDI benefits will find it nearly impossible to obtain housing in Howard County without a rental subsidy.

The cost of a modest one-bedroom apartment in Maryland is approximately 146% of SSI income – the third highest rate in the nation. And in Columbia, a one-bedroom apartment costs approximately 183% of SSI income.¹³

For individuals and households with extremely low incomes – those with incomes below 15% of the area median income – housing subsidies are urgently needed. When developing new housing, a percentage of the units need to be targeted to those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.



Housing is often unattainable for people with disabilities.

Based on these findings, the Commission recommends that the County Executive and the County Council:

- Develop and support initiatives to increase the availability of integrated, affordable and accessible housing opportunities for residents with disabilities whose incomes are below 15% of Howard County’s area median income.

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4. A comprehensive and reliable public transportation system remains a critical concern for people with disabilities.

Inadequate public transit services severely impact individuals with disabilities who depend upon public transit to get to and from work, school, medical appointments, shopping, recreational activities, etc.

Howard County's public transportation system consists of two components: fixed route service and paratransit.



Individuals with disabilities greatly depend on an accessible and efficient transportation network to achieve and maintain their independence.

Individuals can qualify for paratransit services based on age (60+) or disability. Fixed route transit services offer flexibility and, unlike paratransit, do not require riders to pre-schedule their trips.

Fixed route services are also much more cost-effective than paratransit services. Paratransit trips currently cost the County more than \$44.00 for each one-way trip (\$88.00 for each round trip), with riders paying a fare of \$2.50 for each one-way trip.¹⁴ People with disabilities who are able to utilize the fixed route transit services should be encouraged to do so.

Improvements are needed to help transform fixed route services into a more viable and attractive transportation option for riders with disabilities. Greater inter-connectivity between the various fixed routes and a reduction in the need for travel to a centralized "transit hub" for transfers are options for making public transit more time-efficient for riders.

ADA paratransit mirrors fixed route transit services. Transportation options for people who rely on ADA paratransit are limited in areas where there are no fixed route services.

Howard County's aging fleet of vehicles, used for both fixed route and paratransit, is an area of critical concern. As of August 2016, 36% of transit vehicles were at or over their useful life, versus a desired percentage of no more than 10% of fleet vehicles being at their useful life's end.¹⁵



It is vital that vehicles and equipment are properly maintained and updated to provide optimal service.

Inoperable equipment, such as wheelchair lifts, are a violation of the ADA and render public transit useless and inaccessible for riders who have mobility disabilities that require the use of vehicle lifts. Inoperable equipment increases the potential for discrimination complaints and lawsuits.

Based on these findings, the Commission recommends that the County Executive and the County Council:

- Include adequate funding for the acquisition of new transit vehicles, vehicle maintenance and repairs, and other expenditures needed to promote and enhance performance of fixed route and paratransit services. Develop and support plans for expansion of fixed route transit services to underserved areas of the County.

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2016 – The Year in Review



Arthur Gold, Chair, Howard County Commission on Disability Issues (above, left) and Howard County Executive Allan H. Kittleman present a proclamation.



Honorees at the Howard County Commission on Disability Issues 2016 Annual Awards Ceremony.

To fulfill its statutory purpose, the Commission and its subcommittees conducted or engaged in numerous activities throughout the course of the year. The Commission:

- Reviewed Guilford Road sidewalk plans in January 2016.
- Reviewed plans/drawings for Port Capital Drive, New Colony Boulevard and Harbour Drive in February.
- Co-sponsored Howard County's third annual Transition Symposium in March, "Stop Waiting and Start Planning!" a symposium for transitioning youth with disabilities, ages 14 to 21, their parents, families and service providers.

- Met with representatives from the Howard County Office of Transportation in April for an overview of the Complete Streets Policy and the bicycle and pedestrian plans; to review concept plans to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Centennial Lane between Old Annapolis Road and Frederick Road.
- Met with the Department of Public Works and the Office on Aging to review plans for the Loan Closet at the Long Reach Village Center.
- Hosted a round table discussion, "What Will I Do When the Bus Stops Coming?" in May.
- Led a discussion regarding the state of accessible parking and parking enforcement in the county on June 14.
- In June, reviewed plans for the East Columbia Library and 50+ Center, and for the Elkridge Library, DIY Center and 50+ Center.
- Met with the County Executive in August and discussed concerns related to housing, transportation, and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Hosted a presentation in September on guardianship alternatives and financial planning.
- Held its signature event, the Annual Awards Program, in October. Awards were given to several individuals and businesses in recognition of their contributions to the Howard County community, and in recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.
- Co-sponsored the November presentation, "Social Security Disability Programs: Understanding the Benefits, Utilizing the Work Incentives" for parents and families, service providers, and teachers.
- Participated in a "Complete Streets Policy Stakeholder Group Update" meeting in November.

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End Notes

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