

**St. Mary's County Maryland,
Commission on Aging
Annual Report for 2025**

1. **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the Commission on Aging (COA) is to advise and assist in the content, administration, and financing of county programs designed to serve the elderly residents of the county; to work with the community to develop awareness and understanding of problems and concerns of the elderly; and to provide the Commissioners with advice and assistance regarding county programs and resources offered to senior residents (50 years and older) of St. Mary's County.

2. **MEMBERSHIP:**

The COA began its calendar year with two new members. Members for 2025 are: Barbara O'Neal (Chairperson), Rowena Bossio (Vice Chairperson), Kimberly Hansing (Secretary), Triverr Gray, Dawnn Hahn, Aurora Hidalgo, Kei Jenkins, Christine Morgan, Shalonda Nelson, Sara Oliver, and Omonigho Olumese. Department of Aging & Human Services Department (DAHS) members, Lori Jennings-Harris and Mercedes Jones, also attend the monthly meetings.

3. **COA MEETINGS:** Meetings are held the fourth Monday of the month at 1:00 pm at the Garvey Senior Activity Center. Due to the Christmas holiday, a meeting was not held in December.

4. **COA HIGHLIGHTS/GUEST SPEAKERS:**

The COA goal during the year was to increase outreach and provide information to community seniors. Therefore, the COA hosted guest speakers to provide information on the many services offered to the seniors in the County. The presentations from the guest speakers are posted on the YouTube channel associated with DAHS. Highlights from the monthly meetings are identified below along with the list of guest speakers who provided us with information and handouts regarding some of the current issues affecting the senior community. During the year, we also held a special meeting to discuss and formalize COA processes and procedures.

January 27: There were discussions on the upcoming goals and objectives for 2025 including the need for continued outreach to the community. We discussed the goals and objectives of the 2024 Continuity Plan drafted by the COA Chairperson, Barbara O'Neal, and previously approved by the COA. In addition, there was an election of officers for the upcoming year. Barbara O'Neal (Chairperson), Rowena Bossio (Vice Chairperson) and Kimberly Hansing (Secretary) were elected to their positions.

February 24: A representative from the Department of Emergency Services (Jennifer Utz, Director) attended to address the initiatives in work to address seniors concerns regarding charges for utilizing ambulance services. An Outreach program will be initiated to address senior concerns.

March 24: At this meeting, a representative from Emergency Services returned to provide an update to the EMS billing process which included assurances that patients of Emergency Services do not have to pay. She provided a FAQ flyer which addresses the EMS Billing services and points of contact.

Mr. John Houser, County Attorney, provided the information regarding the latest twelve bills introduced in the legislature which impact the community at large as well as seniors specifically. He also provided additional information in a comprehensive memorandum summarizing key issues of the bills before the Maryland General Assembly.

April 28: One of the COA members, Dawnn Hahn, presented a detailed briefing of the Asbury Solomons which included options and opportunities provided by this retirement and maintenance-free senior living community. During this meeting, the COA discussed additional outreach projects for the upcoming year.

May 19: The COA discussed scheduling future presentations and addressed future initiatives to be undertaken by the COA during the remainder of the year.

June 23: The Maryland Secretary of Department of Aging, Carmen Roques, attended the COA meeting and briefed us on state-wide initiatives pertaining to the aging population. Central to her briefing was the initiative “Longevity Ready Maryland” which addresses the longevity ecosystem, economic opportunity, affordability of housing, healthcare, retirement planning & optimization of health, wellness, and mobility throughout the state infrastructure. After the Secretary’s briefing, the COA discussed administrative rules for future COA meetings.

July 21: A special meeting was held to discuss and identify process steps and procedures associated with COA meetings. A document was created, reviewed and approved by the COA.

July 28: This meeting focused on an initiative to provide seniors and their caregivers with information regarding the risks and mitigation strategies associated with “falls”. A subject matter expert from Thriving in Place provided a briefing followed which was followed by a discussion on how and when to address this important health issue with seniors. In addition, she provided information on the “Saving Claire” initiative which provides out-of-the-box turnkey solution to building and growing an effective Fall Prevention Program.

We discussed the lack of housing within our community. The COA Chairperson, Barbara O’ Neal, provided data regarding housing shortages which included Southern Maryland populations who are unsheltered, and/or experiencing emergency shelters, and/or able to transition to housing with the data indicating that a majority were housed in emergency shelters.

August 25: During this meeting, the COA discussed the potential for collaboration of the Healthy St Mary's Partnership and COA in hosting a public meeting to offer information on preventing falls via the "Saving Claire" program.

September 22: Danielle Manalansan, DAHS Home-Delivered Meals Coordinator, presented information on how and when meals are delivered to the home-bound seniors. We discussed if, how, and when the COA can fund and deliver gift bags to the at home seniors.

October 9: Two COA members, representing St. Mary's County, attended the annual Tri-County meeting hosted by Calvert County. Highlights from the meeting included a presentation by Jenna Crawley, Deputy Secretary of Maryland Department of Aging. Ms. Crawley provided an overview of Longevity Ready Maryland (LRM) including the vision for ensuring Maryland seniors are healthy, financially secure, socially connected, and purposeful. The goals of LRM include the building of an ecosystem, promoting economic opportunities, discussing affordability in support of the aging population, and optimizing health, wellness, and mobility.

We also were provided with briefings from the Chesapeake Charities (a local community foundation), veterans, the Calvert County COA, and a health care representative who provided important information on advanced directives.

October 27: Because a quorum was not established, the monthly COA meeting was not held.

November 24: Melissa Craig, MAP I&A Manager, presented information on Medicare and Medicare Advantage programs. We also discussed funding and the logistics associated with the purchase and delivery of gifts bags for the homebound seniors.

5. **CHALLENGES/PLANS FOR 2026:** Maintaining attendance at monthly meetings is an on-going challenge for the COA; therefore, we will continue to address this issue in the coming year. We will focus on outreach and host briefings on issues affecting seniors. Whenever possible, we will reach out to local organizations to build partnerships with the goal of improving the support of seniors in the county.
6. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** The COA extends our gratitude and thanks to those who provided briefings during the year. We also appreciate the support provided by Lori Jennings-Harris, Director, and other DAHS members who provided valuable information and assistance during the year. The COA also thanks Mercedez Jones, Coordinator, for her superb support and assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Rowena Bossio

Vice Chairperson, St. Mary's County, Commission on Aging