

Maryland Commission on Caregiving

October 2, 2025

10:30 AM -12:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

Agenda Google Meet joining info

[Video call link: https://meet.google.com/hev-nfhr-qci](https://meet.google.com/hev-nfhr-qci)

Or dial: (US) +1 775-442-4189 PIN: 786 637 297#

Meeting Minutes

- Commission Members Present: Julia Abate; Mary Anne Kane Breschi; Jennifer Eastman, Yetunde Olobatuyi; Chalarra Sessoms; Trina Townsend; Patricia Morris; Molly Wisniewski; Delegate Jamilya Woods
- Guests: Dorina Adams; Juanita Banks; Anna Byon; Matthew Carpenter; Teresa Jeter-Cutting; Bevia Hensley; Melissa Karcher; Grace Macalino; Kyla Pendleton; Megan Peters; Dolapo Olomo
- Approval of September Meeting Minutes
 - Motion to Approve: Mary Anne
 - Second: Yetunde
 - Result: Approved

Call for Subcommittee Volunteers

- Legislative Subcommittee
 - Focus: Address caregiving issues across the lifespan with diverse representation.
 - Seeking members with expertise in disabilities and youth caregiving.
 - Potential Volunteers: Julz Abate and Mary Anne Kane Breschi expressed interest and will notify the Chair to confirm.
 - Current members: Leslie Ray (Chair), Greg Sesek, Theresa Robertson, Dorinda Adams, Megan Peters, Molly Wisniewski
- Funding Subcommittee

- Purpose: Identify and recommend sustainable funding sources to support caregiver programs, Commission initiatives, and mandates.
- If you are interested in joining this subcommittee, please let Molly Wisniewski know.
- Outreach Subcommittee
 - Purpose: Increase Commission visibility and promote awareness of available caregiver resources, training, and initiatives.
 - If you are interested in joining this subcommittee, please let Molly Wisniewski know.

Presentation: National Kinship Care Month – Successes and Impact

Presenter: Trina Townsend, MCC Commissioner and DHS Human Service Program Plan Administrator IV, Kinship Navigator Specialist

Key Data & Context

- Approximately 2.5 million children are raised in kinship or grandfamilies.
- The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 prioritizes family-based care and strengthens support for kinship caregivers.

Challenges for Kinship Caregivers Identified:

- Initial engagement and lack of support at placement.
- Feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed.
- Limited access to information, training, and respite.
- Lack of recognition as caregivers.
- Legal barriers to applying for benefits or services.
Difficulty balancing appointments, work, and child care.

Barriers for Kinship Caregivers:

- Lack of legal documentation for kinship caregivers.
- Limited awareness of available programs.
- Overwhelming demands and emotional stress.

Supports & Successes:

- Kinship Navigator Programs connect families with community resources, support groups, and training.

- Activities to celebrate and support kinship families include luncheons, zoo trips, family fun days, and gift card distributions across several Maryland counties.
- Examples:
 - Cecil County: 23 families (78 participants) luncheon at Milburn Orchard.
 - Frederick County: 16 families visited Catoctin Wildlife Preserve.
 - Upper Shore: Family fun day at Church Hill Park, \$150 gas/grocery gift cards.
 - Prince George's County: Kinship Care Family Day, 8 a.m.–3 p.m., Oct 3, 2025, at the Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex.

Discussion: Kinship Care Funding, Access, and Implementation

Funding Updates and Allocation

- Trina shared that Maryland recently received an additional \$20,000 from the Administration of Children and Families Kinship Care Grant.
- Every county receives funding based on population size, ensuring that *no jurisdiction is without support*.
- Montgomery County currently has two designated Kinship Navigators, and all counties are expected to maintain or expand local navigation services.
- Kin Connection Funds are being used to help families remain stable and offset unexpected costs related to caregiving.
- By January–February 2026, Maryland expects to integrate new state funding streams to provide more flexible, concrete supports for kinship families.

Program Administration and Local-Level Implementation

- Julz asked how these funds and supports are being administered locally and particularly in Montgomery County, noting the importance of ensuring that kinship caregivers can access resources without unnecessary barriers.
 - Montgomery County currently has two designated Kinship Navigators, and all counties are expected to maintain or expand local navigation services.
- Trina explained that funding distribution is based on population and coordinated through each local DSS office, with flexibility to tailor programs to community needs.

Documentation and Guardianship Barriers

- Julz raised a recurring challenge: many grandparent caregivers applying for respite do not have formal legal guardianship documentation, which often complicates eligibility.

- Trina acknowledged this concern and shared that Health Care Affidavits can be a useful tool—allowing kinship caregivers to access medical care for children without full legal custody.
- Families can also access free assistance through Family Court Circuit Court Navigators, who help them complete necessary forms and understand options.
- She emphasized that kinship caregivers often resist formal guardianship because they do not want to feel like they are *replacing* the child’s parents—underscoring the emotional complexity of these arrangements.

Community Engagement and Local Events

- Juanita shared details about an upcoming Kinship Caregiver Celebration in Anne Arundel County, held on September 27 in partnership with [Charlene’s Circle](#).
 - The event will include respite care for children, facilitated discussion groups for caregivers, and a food pantry.
 - A county proclamation recognizing kinship caregivers will be presented.

Legislative and Federal Context

- Jennifer expressed interest in the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018, noting its bipartisan origins and asking whether Maryland has seen a measurable increase in kinship placements since its passage, as well as whether federal funding is at risk during the potential government shutdown.
- Trina confirmed that awarded federal grants are secure for at least another year. While the shutdown’s long-term effects remain uncertain, Maryland is prioritizing preventive services and family-based placements under FFPSA.
- The state is reviewing evidence-based models from other states (including Ohio, Arizona, and Delaware) that have successfully leveraged Title IV-E funding to expand kinship supports and obtain reimbursement.

Data, Disabilities, and Identification

- Mary Anne commended the progress and asked whether data exists on the percentage of children in kinship care who have developmental disabilities. She plans to coordinate with CJAMS and MD THINK to gather relevant statistics.
- Trina noted that many families do not identify as kinship caregivers, making accurate data collection challenging.
- The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) is increasingly focusing on caregivers across the lifespan—especially aging grandparents raising children with disabilities.

Referral Pathways and Support Requests

- Mary Anne encouraged members to refer kinship caregivers directly to her, as she can connect families with available resources and supports. She emphasized that the impact of caregiving can be life-altering—many grandparents leave the workforce to care for children—and early connection to resources is critical.

Additional Comments and Updates

- Patricia Morris thanked Trina for the detailed presentation and noted that she has been in contact with *Hands of Hope* and *Charlene's Circle*, both of which serve kinship caregivers who are also balancing care for children with special needs.
- Delegate Woods voiced strong support for the work and expressed interest in being actively involved in future discussions and events.
- Mary Anne added that Juanita can provide information on daycare options that include background checks and whole-family participation (four-hour family sessions).
- Children's Choice is introducing new mental health resources and partnership opportunities with other agencies.
- Chalarra from BHA added that Medicaid agencies are exploring expanded respite supports for children with mental health diagnoses, noting that *one in four* children in care are assessed for such conditions.

Upcoming Event Reminder

- Prince George's County Kinship Care Conference
Date: Friday, October 3, 2025
Time: 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Location: Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex
8001 Sheriff Road, Landover, MD 20785
Details: <https://plccommunity.org/2025kinship/>

Upcoming Presentation (November)

Topic: Demonstration of the MDOA Caregiver Assessment Tool (launching 2026)
Presenters: 211 Maryland, MDOA, and Johns Hopkins University

December Holiday Gathering Suggestion

- Location: Severn Inn, Annapolis (accessible, riverside view, accommodating menu, ample parking)
- Date and Time: TBD

Announcements & Updates

Government Shutdown & Federal Program Impacts

- Members discussed potential impacts of a federal government shutdown on veteran services and social programs, including food supplement programs, WIC, and other critical supports.
- Trina noted that agencies are preparing for possible funding delays and exploring partnerships with other state organizations to supplement resources and maintain continuity of services during unexpected funding interruptions.

Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Update

- DDA continues to develop its statewide Disabilities Action Plan, emphasizing caregivers across the lifespan.
- A key focus is on older adult caregivers, including aging parents and grandparents supporting individuals with developmental disabilities.

Maryland Commission on Caregiving Update

- Chalarra Sessoms announced her departure from her current role as Commissioner, with hopes of remaining connected to the Commission and potentially returning to the respite care field in the future.
- Members expressed appreciation for her contributions and commitment to caregiver support initiatives over the past two terms.

AARP “Recovery Mode” Pilot Project

- The AARP Recovery Mode Pilot continues to advance, with Maryland serving as a lead state in implementation.
- A comprehensive needs assessment has been submitted to the AARP National Office, and results will be shared publicly once compiled.
- The next phase will focus on mapping and developing a statewide library of mental health and respite resources, in collaboration with NAMI Maryland and the Commission.
- Trina emphasized that this is not solely an AARP Maryland initiative—the Commission is a full partner in the project, ensuring that caregiver mental health remains a central focus.

Website and Public Access (Yetunde Update)

- The Commission's webpage is now housed under the Department of Human Services (DHS) website.
- The Communications Department is assisting with updates, including:
 - A list of all current Commissioners with contact information.
 - Details on how members of the public can participate in monthly meetings.
 - Posting of meeting minutes from FY2024, FY2025, and eventually FY2026 for public access and transparency.
- Molly's contact information will be included for public inquiries related to Commission membership and meeting participation.
- Yetunde noted that uploading historical materials will take time but remains a top priority.

Medicare GUIDE Program

- Julz raised a question regarding the Medicare GUIDE Program, seeking clarification on available eligibility criteria and respite coverage options.
- Megan Peters, representing the Alzheimer's Association, offered to share informational materials outlining how Medicare programs can help cover certain respite services. These materials will be distributed to Commission members for awareness and community outreach.

Meeting Adjourned