



COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OCTOBER 14, 2024

The Commission for Persons with Disabilities convened virtually on Monday, October 14, 2024. Members and attendees joined the virtual meeting with video conference and conference call.

Commissioners Present

Anne Kearney, *Vice Chair*
Willie Johnson Jr.,
County Supervisor
Marcia Perkins, *Secretary*
Shanika Baldwin
Felicia Clayborne
John Haupt Barbara Leigh
Rose Onama
Leon Todd

Commissioners Excused

Deb Falk-Palec, *Chair*
Allison Caudill
Sherry Mickelson

Present Staff

Jay-Sun Bowman, *DHHS*
Jacqueline Formanek, *DHHS*
Julie Lara, *DHHS*
Tina Anderson, *DHHS*
Cleopatra Castaneda, *DHHS*
Davia Fenton, *DHHS*
Bekki Schmidt, *DHHS*

Attendees from the Public

Jessica Kowalski
Fran Musci, *MCTS*
Christine Schultz, *TMG*
Levi Stein, *Friendship Circle*

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Vice Chair, Anne Kearney called the meeting to order at 1p.m. Jay-Sun Bowman, Director of the Office for Persons with Disabilities took roll. A quorum was present at the start of the meeting.

II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 9, 2024, COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: To accept the September 9, 2024, Commission for Persons with Disabilities meeting minutes given that corrections/changes be made as suggested by Vice Chair Kearney to more appropriately reflect the motions that were made.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Todd Moved, Perkins Second)

III. OFFICE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (OPD)

- a. **Thank you, Mike Bonk:** Vice Chair Kearney announced that Deputy Director Mike Bonk is no longer with the county, and in consultation with Chair Deb Falk-Palec, it was decided to express gratitude to him for his work with the Commission, Office for Persons with Disabilities, and Milwaukee

County. Commissioner Barbara Leigh expressed her appreciation for Bonk's leadership and his individual attention, while Commissioner Secretary Marcia Perkins praised Bonk for being patient and open to making meetings smooth. Commissioner John Haupt praised Bonk's exemplary service and professionalism, while Commissioner Leon Todd commented on Mike's professionalism and praised Bonk as a true steward and gatekeeper. Anne Kearney's video froze so it was decided to move onto Staffing and OPD Vision until Anne could rejoin the call.

b. Staffing OPD and Vision Tina Anderson, Aging and Disability Services

Administrator: Tina Anderson, Administrator Disability Services, thanked the board for the accolades and emphasized the importance of getting to know the Director for Office for Persons with Disabilities, Jay-Sun Bowman.

Director Anderson expressed her gratitude to the board and the Director for OPD, Jay-Sun Bowman, for his support and the opportunity to get to know each member individually.

The board at ADS is seeking voluntary participation in their vision for growth and expansion. They believe that their board members are their most important customers and are the driving force behind their work. The vision for OPD is to focus on individuals with disabilities and be the voice for those dealing with differing abilities in Milwaukee County. They are seeking input from the community and their loved ones to improve their services. They are applying for additional grants to expand their services, and this will be evident in the coming months.

Tina Anderson discussed the hierarchy of the Office of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) in Milwaukee County, which is divided into various service areas. Director Bowman oversees the OPD, while Deputy Director Mike Bonk fills a vacant position. The Aging and Disability Services Administrator handles operations for ADS under the OPD umbrella. Director Shakita LaGrant provided answers to the County Executive.

In conclusion, the OPD office is a vital part of the ADS hierarchy, with directors like Cleopatra Castaneda, Bekki Schmidt, Dan Idzikowski, and Jay-Sun Bowman working together to provide comprehensive services for persons with disabilities.

In a letter from Chair Deb Falk-Palec read by Vice Chair Kearney, Chair Deb Falk-Palec praised Mike Bonk's work, stating he was an asset to the county and all citizens with disabilities. Chair Falk-Palec praised Bonk's professionalism, public servant attitude, and deep knowledge on disability, enhancing Milwaukee County's accessibility for those with disabilities.

Vice Chair Kearney shared her appreciation for Mike Bonk's work stating that he put the needs of the people who have disabilities first. She also stated that we all benefitted from his expertise, his hard work, and his can-do attitude.

Director of Disability Services Jay-Sun Bowman expressed gratitude to Mike

for his assistance and training in the office. He expressed humility and gratitude for his position and the city he has lived in. Bowman's objectives are to move the office forward and upward. He plans to meet with the office to share his vision and hear feedback. Vice Chair Kearney expressed gratitude for Bowman's efforts and emphasized the possibility of opportunities. Bowman's vision is to work together with the office to move it forward.

IV. SPECIAL REPORTS

- a. Informational Item, Transit Plus Report,** Fran Musci, Paratransit Customer Service Coordinator gave the report as follows. The Transit Plus report for September showed a performance of 93.4% on time, with 30,479 paratransit rides provided. However, some days were less consistent due to drivers not following policies. Transdev has brought in drivers from Florida and other states to ensure the workforce can support demand. The online and smartphone app, My Transit Manager, has reached 370 users, allowing riders to track their vans in real-time.

The "My Agency Portal" has been launched and allows day programs or dialysis facilities to track their clients' rides to and from a portal. If any of the Commissioners know of an agency that could benefit from this service, they are encouraged to set up a link for it.

The Transit Plus Same Day pilot program was launched in September 2024, providing same-day rides for health and work purposes. The program is \$10 each way for one rider and allows companions for an additional \$10. The program will run until funds run out, which is expected to be September 2025.

The county board has set limitations on the service, requiring trips to be for health, wellness, or employment purposes and not scheduled the day before. Examples of such rides include those who need to go home from work due to illness or need to pick up prescriptions.

The program will run until funds run out, with an anticipated end date of September 2025. The company is seeking funds for continuation beyond the pilot program due to grant requests.

Another important announcement is the retirement of Lisa Walters, the customer relations coordinator for all things paratransit. A new manager will take over her responsibilities and manage some programs, including the same-day pilot. Lisa will be recognized at the January 2025 TPAC meeting, and anyone interested in joining the team is invited. Vice Chair Kearney expressed gratitude to Fran Musci and proceeds to the next agenda item, which is an update on listening sessions.

Vice Chair Kearney suggested sending a thank you letter to Lisa Walther in advance.

- b. Informational Item, Joint Listening Sessions,** Davia Fenton, ADRC and ILSP Administrative Assistant, Aging and Disabilities Services gives an update that the Aging and Disabilities Resource Center (ADRC) is planning three listening sessions this year, with three separate events. The first session will be held on October 22, 2024, at the United Community Center, primarily in Spanish-speaking areas, with a Spanish interpreter present. The second session will be held on October 31st, 2024, at the Progressive Community Health Center, focusing on the medical aspect of services. The third session will be held on November 16, 2024, at Wil-O-Way Underwood.

The listening sessions are designed to provide feedback from people receiving services from Milwaukee County to improve the quality of those services. Last year, the ADRC had a good turnout, and they identified areas for improvement. They are working with the Office of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that the listening sessions are accessible to all interested parties.

Vice Chair Kearney thanked Miss Davia Fenton for her input and shared two points: the need to hear more from the disabilities community and the importance of getting the word out about them. Chair Deb Falk-Palec also expressed interest in Commissioners attending these sessions, as they can provide valuable insights into the gaps and services they believe could be addressed from the disability's perspective.

The dates for the listening sessions have been confirmed by Director Bowman, who will send the flyer to the committee. The third session will be held in conjunction with the Passion Fair, held on November 16, 2024, at Wil-O-Way Underwood.

- c. Informational Item, Friendship Circle Presentation,** Levi Stein, Executive Director, The Friendship Circle, founded in 1994 by Daniel Sobel, is a non-profit organization that provides support to individuals with disabilities in Milwaukee County. The organization began as a response to the isolation and loneliness experienced by young adults struggling with addiction. In the late 90s, a family with a child with disabilities sought help through Friends at Home, a program where teen volunteers visit homes of children with disabilities to hang out and be friends. The organization has grown over the years, offering various adult programming, including social recreational activities like Taekwondo, bowling, drum circle, singing along, apple picking, and more. In 2017, Friendship Circle started an employment training program for adults with disabilities, which was expanded in 2020 with the opening of a coffee shop, bakery, and art studio in Fox Point. This program provides a six- or twelve-month track for adults with disabilities to learn job skills. Then they are helped to find jobs with business partners in Milwaukee County or Ozaukee County.

The Youth Transition coordinator is responsible for helping adults transition into the workforce after graduating high school. The program supports students who are unsure about how to navigate the transition process and is a valuable resource for those transitioning into adulthood.

Friendship Circle also has a mental health division called "You Matter," which was established in 2020 to address the mental health issues in the community. The organization started its program for suicide prevention after the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to bring the organization back to its roots and provide support to those in need.

In summary, Friendship Circle is a vital organization that provides support to individuals with disabilities in Milwaukee County. The organization's foundational programs, such as Friends at Home, offers hope and support for those in need.

Friendship Circle's main programs include employment training, social recreational programming, and team and youth programming. The friends at home program are a volunteer program for young adults with disabilities from seventh grade to college age through high school, with a focus on transitioning to employment. If a person decides not to work but wants to socialize, they are referred to social programs.

- d. Informational Item, Election Commission, Staff, Executive Director, Milwaukee County** Executive Director for the City of Milwaukee Election Commission, Paulina Gutierrez informed Commissioners, The City of Milwaukee Election Commission is working to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities at election sites. They have 180 polling locations on Election Day, making them the largest jurisdiction in Milwaukee County. The commission has 14 drop boxes that are now open until 6:00 PM on Election Day, and 10 early voting centers that open next Tuesday. Voters can vote at any of these centers or go to their polling location on Election Day.

There is also a vote by mail option for those who cannot get to the polls due to illness or disability. If they are in hospital, they can sign up as an indefinitely confined voter without showing proof of ID. For those facing hospitalization during Election Day, they should call their clerk's office. The commission also has special voting deputies at long-term care facilities that qualify to vote and administer mini polling locations.

The city has started tracking complaints and concerns received on ADA accessibility to help solve problems and prevent future issues. They have 180 polling locations located in old buildings, making it challenging to provide accessible voting options. Every polling location has an express vote machine, which provides accessibility access for voting.

Vice Chair Kearney thanked Executive Director Gutierrez for her assistance and asked if each polling place is considered accessible to people with physical disabilities. Executive Director Gutierrez stated that every polling location should have accessibility, and they train their chiefs to do surveys and send materials to make them accessible. However, the commission cannot explain referendums, so feedback is appreciated.

The City of Milwaukee Elections Commission has a city-wide line at (414)

286- 8683. They have about 15 people working full time to answer questions and will have more people on Election Day or Email:
Voterinfo@milwaukee.gov is also available for assistance.

The commission is committed to making sure people feel comfortable voting and appreciates the help of the public. They train staff to walk everyone through the process and can even fill out the ballot for those who cannot do it themselves.

V. ACTION / DISCUSSION / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- a. Discussion/Action Item, Program Access Committee Update, Barbara Leigh, Program Access Chairwoman,** Vice Chair Kearney discussed the letter sent to the Equal Rights Commission, with Commissioner Leigh appreciating Kearney's reworking. Issues include controversial contract with out-of-state organization for HACM's better services.
- i. ARPA Housing Update – James Mathy questions,** The next agenda item was Housing Administrator James Mathy, who was also busy. Director Bowman informed the committee that no information had been received in response to questions from James Mathy. The committee suggested continuing to reach out to James Mathy and trying to get answers to their questions.
- b. Discussion Item, Laptops for Commission Members,** Director Bowman updated the committee on laptops, advising all commissioners to use them for communication and public meetings. The committee will receive training on meeting rules and asking questions, emphasizing the importance of using email or phone instead of texting.
- c. Discussion Item, Recreation Update,** Jacqueline Formanek, Recreations Services Coordinator, provided an update on the fall adult recreation program, which runs through November 22, 2024. The program includes bowling, bingo, Friday night dances, socialization, and Saturday outings at local restaurants. The Winter Recreation Guide is available for registration and will run from December 2, 2024, through February 28, 2025.

The next upcoming events include Passion Fair, a fundraiser breakfast at Underwood, Wil-O-Way camp fundraiser breakfast, and a kid's day off from spring break respite camp at Underwood. The theme for this year's event is Hollywood Rewind, celebrating the 90 years of service with Easter Seals. Easter Seals is also partnering with UW Extension to offer accessible gardening craft opportunities at Grant.

Summer Respite Camp registration opens on January 15, 2025. OPD ticket partnerships include free Admiral tickets, free holiday folk fair tickets, and discounted Bucks and Marcus tickets.

Commissioners also discussed the importance of accessibility for passable items and materials, and the county's website, which is updated with flyers, information, and the REC guide.

d. Discussion Item, Other Matters By The Commission, No report.

e. Discussion Item, Other Matters By The Public, No report.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Todd moved, Leigh second)

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE DECEMBER 9, 2024, AT 1 P.M.