

**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**LGBTQIA+ Workgroup**  
**MINUTES**

**September 20, 2024**

- **Members Present:**

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Chair  
Courtney Mariette, Deputy Director, OCR, Co-Chair  
Dr. Diane Young, Department of Health  
Jason Jude, Us Helping Us  
Jose Villegas, Deputy Director/Chief of the Investigation Division

- **Member Absent:**

Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Department of Family Services  
Khoury Lassiter, Advocate for Youth  
Lauren Wethers-Coggins, Department of Social Services  
Renee Battle-Brooks, Office of Human Rights  
Jermaine Wyatt, Director of Community Health

- **Other Present:**

Oliver Carter, Sasha Bruce  
Aliyah Clark, Sasha Bruce  
Sindy Ferrufino, Sasha Bruce

- **Staff Present**

Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director  
Rhonda Riddick, HHSPS Committee Aide  
Tiffany Hannon, Chief of Staff to Council Member  
James Walker-Bey, Public Service Aide  
Rita Lassiter, Communications Specialist

- **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

As a reminder, all Workgroup meetings are recorded and posted on the Council's webpage and are open to the public.

Co-Chair Oriadha opened the meeting by emphasizing the importance of addressing various issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community, such as healthcare, housing, and other critical areas. The Workgroup, created by resolution, aims to foster comprehensive discussions and develop solutions through policy and resource investment. Co-Chair Oriadha highlighted the significance of including perspectives from government agencies, the legislative branch, and non-profits.

- **Review of Minutes**

The minutes were approved as presented.

- **Presentation:**

Oliver Carter, Program Manager, Sasha Bruce Youthwork

Co-Chair Oriadha introduced Oliver Carter, Program Manager, Sasha Bruce, who would present their overall programming, including the drop center and bilingual resilience initiatives.

Co-Chair Courtney Mariette, Deputy Director for the Office of Community Relations, expressed gratitude to the group and the Sasha Bruce family. After meeting Oliver, she expressed her admiration for the comprehensive programming and services provided to the community and acknowledged the impact of the work being done.

Mr. Carter provided an overview of Sasha Bruce, highlighting its 50 years of service in the DC area and the opening of Promise Place, the first emergency shelter in Prince George's County, about a decade ago. Sasha Bruce has expanded to include 23 programs serving youth aged 14 to 24, primarily focusing on preventing homelessness and unstable housing. He mentioned the organization's continuum of care, which provides street outreach and safe spaces for young people.

Mr. Carter continued discussing the services offered by the Drop-In Center. He explained that the center in DC features street outreach, two homes for youth involved with the Juvenile Justice system, and the only emergency shelter accessible to youth in the area. Additionally, they offer transitional living and extended living programs. He emphasized the interconnectedness of the services provided at the Drop-In Center and in D.C., noting that many youth who come to the center can benefit from these various programs.

Aliyah Clark, Cash Manager at Prince George's County Drop-In Center, presented information about the center's services, primarily assisting youth aged 14 to 24 facing housing instability or homelessness. Ms. Clark emphasized the importance of street outreach, mentioning that staff visit school and community hotspots like laundromats and libraries to raise awareness about their services. The center also helps youth obtain vital records and supports various pathways, including military enlistment, Job Corps, and GED programs. They promote peer support groups and offer workshops in financial literacy and budgeting to empower youth beyond their time at the center.

Ms. Clark further highlighted their mission to provide the support and resources many youths lack, fostering a cycle of empowerment and community building.

Ms. Sindy Ferrufino is a resilience Coach at the Prince George's Drop-In Center, where she works on the Resilience Project, a two-year pilot program to prevent homelessness among youth aged 16-24. The project provides coaching, direct cash transfers, and supportive services to help

achieve immediate and long-term housing stability.

Ms. Ferrufino explained the financial assistance options for the participants. The program targets at-risk youth, particularly those within the LGBTQI community. In addition to financial aid, the project offers support for behavioral health issues and family conflicts. The program includes financial budgeting and plans to introduce peer activities and life skills groups. Their goal is to support over 30 at-risk youth in Prince George's County by providing essential resources and assistance.

Mr. Carter noted that the Resilience Project has already selected clients for this year and will begin again next year. He encouraged anyone interested in the program or its benefits for their communities to reach out.

Mr. Carter stated that the Resilience Project has been operating for two years, with the team in their current location in Palmer Park for about seven months. He highlighted the partnership with a nearby food bank, noting that it provides crucial support for those in need. Mr. Carter expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present and the exposure it brings to their work.

- **Q&A**

Co-Chair Oriadha asked if there was a strategy or way in which you're specifically targeting the LGBTQIA+ youth in the county. Mr. Carter responded by indicating that the grant from Capital One supports this initiative, which includes a dedicated case manager focused on the LGBTQIA+ and Latina communities, which face significant challenges in accessing services. He highlighted the family conflicts often experienced by LGTQIA+ youth and noted that the program intervenes to help. Additionally, the project includes family counseling to help address these issues.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked about the Resilience Project and the selected 30 participants, whether they were from Prince George's County, the DMV, or both. Mr. Carter indicated that the program is a pilot initiative targeting 30 Prince George's County youth. It was established in collaboration with SMILES, the Latin American Youth Center, and Sasha Bruce and is part of a select group of 16 grants awarded nationwide.

The program is youth-led and developed with input from the Prince George's County Youth Advisory Board and CURB. Its focus is on LGBTQIA+ and Latino youth, and funding is allocated based on an assessment of risk factors. To qualify, participants must be unstably housed or at risk of homelessness, as the program is designed to prevent homelessness rather than serve those who are already homeless. This initiative is officially named the Prevention Demonstration Project.

Co-chair Oriadha asked about the difference between unstable housing and homelessness. Mr. Carter indicated that unstable housing in Prince George's County differs from homelessness, which is more visible in places like D.C. Many youths may not identify as homeless, even if they are couch-surfing or staying with friends. This is considered "unstable housing," while

homelessness typically means living on the streets. The challenge in Prince George's County is identifying these youth, as homelessness isn't as openly discussed.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked if, from a location perspective and based on your experience at the current location, you feel it's readily accessible and near the targeted population. Mr. Carter expressed that while 30 youths are in the Resilience Project and 23 are in the Be Easy Project, they can accommodate more. The center is accessible by multiple bus routes, and they offer transportation assistance such as Uber rides or Metro Transit cards to help clients reach the center. Additionally, they provide mobile services, conduct street outreach to meet youth and families where they are, and offer services directly at their locations if needed.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked if there is a lack of resources for our homeless youth who are not couch surfing. Mr. Carter expressed that there is a gap in available beds for homeless youth, but Prince George's County has a street outreach team to assess and place homeless youth when found. Although the Drop-In Center hasn't had any walk-in homeless youth yet, it has assisted youth on its case list in securing housing through the county's Continuum of Care list.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked if placement for homeless youth is generally quick if they're willing and beds are available. Mr. Carter expressed that Sasha Bruce has an emergency shelter called Promise Place with 16 beds, but if it is complete, the County will try other resources. If no beds are available, youth must call the placement line daily to check availability.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked about the process for getting into the foster care system versus the age range where they could live independently or get into transitional housing. Mr. Carter indicated that for youth aged 14-24, there's a distinction between foster care and transitional housing. Foster care is for younger children, while transitional housing or group homes are for older youth, and these are not the same as foster homes.

Co-Chair Mariette asked how this Workgroup can collaborate with Sasha Bruce to amplify the available programs and services or identify emerging trends we could address collectively. Mr. Carter stated he believes it's important to raise awareness – people must understand that, as a county, we must be more empathetic about homelessness and food insecurity. These are the two issues we're facing increasingly, and we must ensure services are available to everyone. We have a wide range of demographics. Our Affirm counseling program works with our staff and the community, focusing on sensitivity and understanding.

Dr. Diane Young, Department of Health, inquired whether Sasha Bruce would be open to collaborating with the Health Department on some services. Mr. Carter responded that they would be willing to partner with the Health Department on some of the services.

Co-Chair Oriadha suggested that we arrange a tour for this group to visit the Sasha Bruce facility and get a firsthand look at the services offered, especially since they are new to the county. This would better equip us to spread the word about your resources and explore how we can assist.

Co-Chair Oriadha thanked the presenter and indicated that the slides, presentation, and recording

would be available on the county website for those who wanted to explore the resources further.

- **Review of Consolidated Subgroups**

Co-Chair Oriadha indicated that the subgroups have been consolidated based on previous discussions. The next step is to divide members into these subgroups. If we don't get more subgroup assignments by early next week, we'll assign members to ensure we can move forward. The goal is for subgroups to begin meeting by October or November, and we'll send out a Doodle poll to schedule standing meetings for each subgroup, similar to our overall Workgroup meetings.

Co-Chair Oriadha stated that we'll have a standard process for submitting recommendations, making it easier to compile and present the findings to the Council and County Executive. Before finalizing the report, we'll send it to all Workgroup members for feedback.

- **Identify Next Steps**

Co-Chair Oriadha indicated that the LGBTQIA+ Workgroup is now down to eight members due to the departure of the County Executive LGBTQIA+ liaison. A new member may join if someone is appointed to the position while the Workgroup is still meeting; otherwise, we will proceed with eight members.

Co-Chair Oriadha requested suggestions for future presentations, and the following non-profits were noted: Heart to Hand, Us Helping Us, and SLK.

Co-Chair Oriadha also inquired if the Health Department would present on other LGBTQIA+ programming, given that they had already given on HIV/AIDS prevention. Dr. Young said they could show their FY 24 and 25 media plan, including an increased focus on LGBTQIA+ issues.

- **Next Meeting Date**

The LGBTQIA+ Workgroup will meet on October 18, 2024, at 2:00 PM

- **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 PM.