

LGBTQIA+ Workgroup
MINUTES

February 21, 2025

- **Members Present:**

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Co-Chair
Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Department of Family Services
Kyla Hanington, Public Outreach & Engagement Division Manager, Office of Human Rights

- **Member Absent:**

Khouri Lassiter, Advocate for Youth
Lauren Wethers-Coggins, Department of Social Services
Jermaine Wyatt, Director of Community Health, Us Helping Us
Jason Jude, Chief of Teams, Us Helping Us
Courtney Mariette, Deputy Director, Office of Community Relations, Co-Chair
Dr. Diane Young, Associate Director, Family Health Services Division, Department of Health

- **Staff Present**

Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director
Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney
Rhonda Riddick, HHSPS Committee Aide
Melody Arrington, EWD Committee Aide
James Walker-Bey, Associate Clerk of the Council
Tiffany Hannon, Chief of Staff to Council Member

- **Welcoming Remarks**

Crystal Oriadha, Co-Chair of the LGBTQIA+ Workgroup, opened the meeting by stating that the Workgroup meetings are public, recorded, and available on the county's webpage along with related documents and presentations. Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized that the Workgroup's goal is to develop recommendations for the County Council and County Executive regarding policy or procedural changes and resource allocations to address key concerns of the LGBTQIA+ community.

- **Review Minutes of the November 15, 2024, meeting**

Co-Chair Oriadha noted that most Workgroup members were absent but emphasized the importance of continuing the discussion on recommendations. The minutes were approved as presented.

- **Focus Topic Discussion – Mental Health/Support Groups/Allyship Outreach**

The Co-Chair explained that today's meeting would discuss subgroup topics and explore recommendations. She indicated that a template for submitting recommendations had been provided, sharing a link where each member has a dedicated tab. Members were encouraged to submit recommendations before the meeting or share them in real-time. Co-Chair Oriadha introduced recommendations related to mental health support groups and allyship outreach. She reviewed pre-submitted recommendations and explained a color-coded system in the document to track their status: green for approved, red for rejected, and yellow for pending or needing further discussion.

- **Emergency Shelter Programs**

Co-Chair Oriadha noted that such a program could involve significant costs for facilities, staffing, and operations but could provide immediate relief and stability for homeless LGBTQIA+ individuals. She referenced a now-closed LGBTQIA+ shelter in D.C. as a model and invited input on existing resources in the county or potential partnership opportunities to develop a similar program.

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized the lack of emergency shelter resources for LGBTQIA+ individuals, noting that a previously available program in D.C. no longer exists. She highlighted a program called Host Homes, which provides housing for LGBTQIA+ young adults aged 18 to 23 who have aged out of foster care. Like foster care, participating hosts receive financial support, but the program is designed explicitly for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Co-Chair Oriadha suggested exploring this model for implementation in Prince George's County.

Elana Belon-Butler, Director of Family Services, suggested exploring therapeutic foster care as a potential framework. Therapeutic foster care differs from traditional foster care because caregivers receive specialized training to address behavioral concerns and diagnoses. These caregivers also receive a stipend, which may vary from standard foster care arrangements.

Staff: Confirm with the Department of Social Services whether a therapeutic foster care program exists and explore the possibility of piloting a similar model tailored to LGBTQIA+ youth.

- **Mobile Health Clinics**

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed the potential benefits of mobile health clinics as a short-term, moderately costly initiative with a high impact on reducing healthcare barriers by bringing services directly into the community. The proposed clinics would focus on free HIV/AIDS testing, counseling, and basic healthcare tailored to LGBTQIA+ needs.

Co-Chair Oriadha mentioned an existing group, Heart to Hand, which already operates a mobile unit in the county for testing. She suggested expanding their services by adding educational resources and screening for PrEP and PEP, which help prevent HIV, as a low-

cost solution. She questioned whether individuals receiving testing through the mobile unit could be directly connected to PrEP and PEP services or if they had to go elsewhere to complete the process.

- **Peer Support Groups**

Co-Chair Oriadha explained the peer support group recommendation, emphasizing its low cost and high impact on fostering resilience, community connections, and reducing isolation and stigma. These groups would be peer-led and focus on LGBTQIA+ youth adults, addressing mental health, discrimination, and coping strategies for living with HIV/AIDS.

Co-chair Oriadha highlighted the importance of linking these groups with safe spaces where individuals could access resources and engage in discussions. Given the high cost of direct mental health services, peer support groups provide a cost-effective alternative, with two potential models: sessions facilitated by licensed professionals or informal peer-led discussions, available both virtually and in person.

Staff: Research existing peer-led LGBTQIA+ support groups in D.C. or Montgomery County to identify potential models that could serve as a reference for establishing a similar model in the county.

- **Legal Aid Clinics**

Co-Chair Oriadha introduced a recommendation for legal aid clinics, noting that while they may have moderate costs, they could empower LGBTQIA+ individuals to challenge systemic discrimination in housing, employment, and healthcare. She acknowledged Maryland Legal Aid as a potential partner but was unsure if the organization had a specialized group focused on LGBTQIA+-related discrimination. She suggested partnering with Maryland Legal Aid or a similar entity would be feasible.

Staff: Contact Maryland Legal Aid to determine whether they have existing expertise in this area and whether additional resources would be needed.

- **Job Training**

The Co-Chair explained the recommendation for a job training program tailored to LGBTQIA+ individuals, recognizing it as a long-term initiative with potentially high costs but significant economic benefits, including reducing the risk of homelessness. She proposed partnering with Employee Prince George's to explore the feasibility and costs of creating a specialized training program, given its existing role in employment services. Co-chair Oriadha emphasized the importance of partnering with affirming businesses to ensure LGBTQIA+ participants, particularly trans individuals, feel safe and supported in their workplace. She suggested that pre-vetting businesses could help prevent discrimination and create a welcoming environment.

Elana Belon-Butler, Director of Family Services, supported the job training recommendation and considered Employ Prince George's a suitable partner. She shared that her agency has a contractual relationship with Employ Prince George's and provides job training for disconnected youth in the county. She agreed that starting small with a reasonable target number could be practical and noted that Employ Prince George's existing relationship would make implementation less challenging. Co-Chair Oriadha supported the idea of launching a small-scale pilot for the job training before expanding,

- **LGBTQIA+ Youth Housing Vouchers**

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed creating a dedicated LGBTQIA+ housing voucher program and acknowledged the potentially high cost of a long-term LGBTQIA+ youth housing voucher program. The program would involve partnerships with government and nonprofit organizations to provide housing support for LGBTQIA+ individuals. She referenced the county's YES program, which encourages developers to set aside units for youth aging out of foster care, suggesting a similar approach to LGBTQIA+ housing. Co-Chair Oriadha proposed an alternative strategy of working with developers to designate affordable set-aside units, partially subsidized through a funding program. Staff: Inquire whether the county's existing housing voucher program is closed to new applicants.

- **Cultural Competency Training for Service Providers**

Co-Chair Oriadha recommended cultural competency training for service providers to improve service delivery and reduce discrimination. The proposed training would target government entities and nonprofit partners, potentially making vendors with county contracts mandatory.

Elana Belon-Butler mentioned that the Office of Human Resources & Management likely offers cultural competency training for government employees, but it is unclear if any are mandatory.

Staff: Look into the current training offerings, including whether any cultural competency courses are required, and consider recommending that such training be mandatory.

- **Community Mentorship Programs**

Co-Chair Oriadha proposed a community mentorship program to pair LGBTQIA+ young adults with mentors who can guide career planning, healthcare access, and personal growth. She referenced a recent school system initiative that created a virtual space for LGBTQIA+ youth and their parents, which included separate work sessions for each group. Co-Chair Oriadha suggested that the next step would be establishing mentorship opportunities, particularly involving government employees, businesses, and nonprofits willing to participate. The proposed program would encourage government employees to volunteer time to support young people, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

- **Inclusive Sex Education Campaigns**

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized the need for inclusive sex education campaigns that focus on HIV prevention, STD awareness, and healthy relationships for all youth, including LGBTQIA+ individuals. She noted that current awareness efforts, often led by the Health Department, may be too narrowly focused on specific groups, reinforcing stigmas and excluding key populations. Co-Chair Oriadha stresses the importance of broadening the campaign's scope to educate all communities while combating misconceptions about who is affected by HIV and STDs. Additionally, Co-Chair Oriadha advocated involving young adults in designing the campaign to ensure effective messaging that aligns with their peers.

- **LGBTQIA+ Community Centers**

Co-Chair Oriadha discusses establishing LGBTQIA+ community centers as a long-term goal due to the high construction cost, staffing, and maintenance costs. These centers would serve as hubs for comprehensive support, offering counseling, job training, and health services tailored to LGBTQIA+ individuals and young adults. She referenced Us Helping Us, which operates a physical location in the northern part of the county and is currently the only LGBTQIA+ community center in the county. She suggested replicating that model with accessible spaces in the county's north, central, and southern parts.

Co-Chair Oriadha suggested partnering with libraries or community centers to host designated programming days focused on LGBTQIA+ youth. This would provide immediate access to resources and support while working toward establishing dedicated spaces. Co-Chair Oriadha proposed ensuring that pamphlets and other information materials are always available at these locations.

- **Identify Next Steps**

Co-Chair Oriadha outlined the structure for future meetings, emphasizing that presentations will still be included. She encouraged members to contact staff to suggest groups of entities that should be present in the Workgroup.

Additionally, the meeting will discuss specific recommendations based on previously agreed-upon topics.

Participants will receive reminders before each meeting, allowing them to pre-submit recommendations for agenda planning. However, new ideas can still be shared during the meeting.

- **Next Meeting**

March 21st @ 2:00 p.m.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:51 p.m.