

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
LGBTQIA+ Workgroup
MINUTES
April 18, 2025

- **Members Present:**

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Co-Chair
Lauren Wethers-Coggins, AFFIRM Program Coordinator, Department of Social Services
Dr. Diane Young, Associate Director, Family Health Services Division, Department of Health
Kyla Hanington, Public Outreach & Engagement Division Manager, Office of Human Rights

- **Member Absent:**

Khouri Lassiter, Advocate for Youth
Courtney Mariette, Deputy Director, Office of Community Relations, Co-Chair
Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Department of Family Services
Jose Villegas, Deputy Director, Office of Human Rights
Jermaine Wyatt, Director of Community Health, Us Helping Us
Jason Jude, Chief of Teams, Us Helping Us

- **Staff Present**

Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director
Rhonda Riddick, HHSPS Committee Aide
Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney
Melody Arrington, EWD Committee Aide
Tiffany Hannon, Staff of Council Member Oriadha

- **Welcome & Remarks**

Co-Chair Oriadha, LGBTQIA+ Workgroup, Vice Chair of the County Council, and representative of District 7, welcomed the attendees and acknowledged the importance of the Workgroup's efforts. She expressed appreciation for everyone's continued participation and emphasized the significance of their shared commitment to the ongoing conversation.

Co-Chair Oriadha reiterated that the LGBTQIA+ Workgroup meetings are open to the public. All presentations and materials shared during the meetings, along with recordings of the sessions, are made available on the County Council website.

She informed the members that Co-Chair Courtney was unable to attend the meeting and extended her apologies to the members.

- **Review the March 21, 2025, minutes.**

The minutes were approved as presented.

- **Focus Topic Discussion**

Co-Chair Oriadha explained that the structure of the meetings had recently shifted to include dedicated time for collaborative discussion on recommendations. She reminded attendees that while the group had identified key focus areas, including but not limited to specific topics, the current meeting would center on recommendations related to domestic violence and its relationship with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Members were informed that they could submit recommendations in advance, but spontaneous contributions and feedback during the meeting were equally welcome. Each Workgroup member has a dedicated section for adding recommendations as they arise. She began the review by introducing a set of pre-submitted recommendations, encouraging members to offer feedback either verbally or through the chat feature.

The discussion was focused on a collaborative effort to identify ways to better serve LGBTQIA+ individuals affected by domestic violence.

- **Mandate LGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training for First Responders, Within Domestic Violence Response Protocols**

The recommendation included a short-term goal of six months, moderate costs primarily for trainers or contracts, and a projected high impact by fostering respectful, informed, and appropriate responses to LGBTQIA+ domestic violence cases.

Ms. Lauren Wethers-Coggins, AFFIRM Program Coordinator, Department of Social Services, shared her involvement with the Community Advisory Board for Progressive Life in the Community, which provides training on domestic violence and intimate partner violence. She noted that while the organization currently operates within the community, its resources and trainers could potentially help expand the reach of culturally competent training through local partnerships.

Ms. Lauren Wethers-Coggins emphasized the need to move beyond optional training and incorporate LGBTQIA+ cultural competency into mandatory first responder training, including both academy instruction and ongoing professional development. She cited the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault as a resource offering gender-affirming care training and suggested it as a potential partner for advancing inclusive education.

Ms. Wethers-Coggins also stressed that foundational cultural humility and addressing unconscious bias are essential components in delivering compassionate and equitable care. She cautioned that technical training alone is insufficient without a deeper understanding of the identities and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals impacted by domestic violence.

- Designate Safe, Affirming Shelter Beds for LGBTQIA+ Domestic Violence Survivors through Partnerships with Existing Providers

Co-Chair Oriadha expressed that this initiative was framed as a mid-term goal with a 6–12-month implementation window and a moderate to high cost depending on whether it involved reallocating existing shelter space or developing entirely new, LGBTQIA+-specific housing.

She noted that while current shelters are expected to be welcoming to all, there is no dedicated funding for LGBTQIA+ designated beds. She raised concerns that general affirming policies may not equate to a true sense of safety for all individuals, particularly transgender individuals. Co-Chair Oriadha advocated for the creation of intentionally designed, dedicated spaces to meet the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ survivors.

As an example, she referenced a Washington, D.C.-based shelter focused on serving the trans community, suggesting it as a model to consider. She stressed the importance of designing systems with the needs of historically underserved communities in mind, rather than relying solely on integrating them into existing structures.

Dr. Diane Young, Associate Director, Family Health Services Division, Health Department, emphasized the importance of requiring shelters to adopt non-discriminatory policies and ensure staff receive appropriate training to support transgender and non-binary individuals. She noted that misgendering and denial of services are among the most frequent complaints received, particularly within the Health Department. She stressed the need for clear policies and training requirements to create truly inclusive and affirming shelter environments.

Ms. Weathers-Coggins agreed with the idea, emphasizing that policies should explicitly reflect a commitment to inclusivity, similar to the group's earlier recommendation that first responders receive required cultural competency training. She also shared that the Department of Social Services is partnering with Sasha Bruce YouthWorks, which recently opened a drop-in center in Prince George's County for youth and young adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness. As part of a prevention demonstration grant, staff from Sasha Bruce will soon receive specialized training on supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. The initial effort, involving approximately ten staff members, is intended to serve as a pilot with the long-term goal of expanding the training across the county's continuum of care. Ms. Weathers-Coggins emphasized the potential to scale the training to shelter staff and other community providers and offered to share content from the pilot as it is developed to inform broader implementation.

- Launch a Public Education Campaign to Promote Healthy Relationships within the LGBTQIA+ Community

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized that abuse can occur in any relationship and shared her personal experience as a domestic violence survivor, noting that her understanding of abuse was initially limited by traditional narratives centered on heterosexual dynamics.

She highlighted the importance of inclusive messaging that helps individuals within same-gender relationships recognize unhealthy behaviors as abuse. The campaign would aim to shift perceptions, normalize discussions about domestic violence in all relationship types, and ensure that LGBTQIA+ individuals see themselves reflected in prevention and support efforts.

Ms. Kyla Harrington, Public Outreach & Engagement Division Manager, Office of Human Rights, discussed an existing collaboration between the Department of Family Services and the Office of Human Rights involving a healthy dating presentation. This presentation has historically been part of community outreach, particularly through the human trafficking task force. It was noted that the Department of Family Services has an established presence with youth in the community and suggested that integrating LGBTQIA+ inclusive content into these healthy dating workshops could be a natural and effective extension of their current efforts.

Co-Chair Oriadha agreed that this is an important opportunity to expand current campaigns by incorporating inclusive language, images, and storytelling that reflect a diverse range of relationships, including those within the LGBTQIA+ community. This recommendation will be noted for inclusion in the final report.

- Inclusivity of Domestic Violence Hotline Services

Co-Chair Oriadha inquired whether hotline staff currently receive mandatory training on inclusive language and whether they have access to a resource database that includes support services specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community. She also noted the importance of understanding the structure and scope of current hotline services to determine if they are community-specific and capable of addressing the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Ms. Wethers-Coggins offered to follow up to clarify if the County has a dedicated domestic violence hotline beyond general emergency services. It was also noted that without intentional data collection during intake, the County may lack critical insight into how often LGBTQIA+ individuals are utilizing these services. She agreed to reach out to Progressive Life Center for more information on these issues.

- Free Legal Clinics specifically for LGBTQIA+ Individuals, Focused on Domestic Violence, Potentially Expanding to Housing and Employment Discrimination

The initiative was identified as a short-term goal that could be implemented within six months by partnering with existing nonprofits that offer legal services. This effort was estimated to require a moderate expense, especially if funded through grants, with the potential for high impact by increasing access to justice for marginalized survivors.

Organizations such as Maryland Legal Aid were mentioned as potential partners, concerns were raised about whether these groups currently have attorneys with the specific expertise or cultural competencies needed to serve LGBTQIA+ clients effectively.

- Establish Free Legal Clinics for LGBTQIA+ Individuals, Prioritizing Domestic Violence, with a Focus on Domestic Violence and Future Expansion to Housing and Employment Discrimination

Co-Chair Oriadha expressed that the proposed recommendation was identified as a mid-term goal with a 6–9-month implementation timeline. She emphasized the importance of building on existing infrastructure by collaborating with community-based organizations already engaged in advocacy work. The program would be peer-led and tailored specifically to the needs of LGBTQIA+ survivors, with a focus on leveraging lived experience to strengthen support systems.

Ms. Wethers-Coggins discussed the potential for building a peer-led survivor advocacy program by leveraging existing models, such as the women’s peer support group previously offered by Progressive Life Center. Although Progressive Life Center does not currently focus specifically on LGBTQIA+ populations, she noted that the organization is increasingly recognizing the importance of inclusive, affirming services. She offered to follow up with Progressive Life Center to learn more about current group activity and participation rates.

- Expand LGBTQIA+ Domestic Violence Services Through Mobile Outreach and Strategic Event Partnerships

Co-Chair Oriadha presented a proposal to implement this effort within a short-term timeline (approximately six months), with low to moderate cost depending on whether the county organizes its (removed own) events or participates through tabling and sponsorship.

She highlighted the challenge of limited LGBTQIA+ nightlife and gathering space in Prince George’s County, noting that many community members instead engage with events and venues in Washington, D.C. Co-Chair Oriadha expressed that from her experience hosting events in the County, turnout has been significantly lower compared to similar efforts in D.C. She suggested to shift outreach strategy, by prioritizing partnerships with D.C.-based LGBTQIA+ venues and events to promote the availability of domestic violence services located in Prince George’s County.

- Expand Trauma-Informed Mental Health Services Specifically Tailored to LGBTQIA+ Survivors of Domestic Violence

Co-Chair Oriadha shared that this recommendation includes partnering with county healthcare providers to increase access, to offer free or sliding-scale therapy. This initiative was identified as a medium- to long-term goal with moderate to high associated costs.

She raised concerns about the broader lack of long-term, affordable mental health care in Prince George’s County. She noted that even individuals with insurance often face limits, such as only six free therapy sessions, making sustained mental health care financially inaccessible. Co-Chair Oriadha questioned whether the county’s Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), such as

Greater Baden, provide ongoing mental health services and whether those services are available at low or no cost.

Dr. Young noted that the county's Local Behavioral Health Authority (LBHA) within the Health Department would be the appropriate entity to address these concerns. She highlighted that challenges around long-term mental health care are widespread nationally, not just within Prince George's County, and have worsened with recent federal administrative changes, including reduced support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Dr. Young emphasized that the LBHA oversees mental health services delivered by community providers and could offer insight into both short- and long-term care availability. She also discussed the underutilization of the county's Crisis Intervention Center at the Dyer Care Center, which could be a resource for expanded services.

Dr. Young further explained that a key barrier identified is that many psychiatric and psychological care providers do not accept insurance, often requiring out-of-pocket payments, which may or may not be offered on a sliding scale. This cost burden makes sustained care inaccessible for many residents.

The Workgroup engaged in an in-depth discussion around the barriers to accessing long-term mental health services for LGBTQIA+ survivors, particularly regarding affordability and insurance limitations. The discussion concluded with an acknowledgment that this is a systemic issue impacting not only Prince George's County but also communities nationwide, and further exploration into funding, grants, and policy adjustments may be needed to increase access to affordable, long-term mental health care.

- Emergency Phones and Transit Access for LGBTQIA+ Survivors

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed a proposed short-term recommendation to improve access to emergency-safe phones and transit cards for LGBTQIA+ domestic violence survivors. The recommendation involves providing prepaid phone and transportation assistance (i.e., bus and Metro cards) to help survivors maintain communication and mobility in emergencies.

This recommendation was identified as feasible within a three-month implementation timeline, particularly if executed through targeted grants to LGBTQIA+, focused service providers who are already connected to and serving the community. These providers could distribute the resources directly to survivors most in need.

- LGBTQIA+ Domestic Violence Youth Prevention Workshops

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed a recommendation to implement LGBTQIA+ domestic violence youth prevention workshops. This initiative aligns closely with existing healthy dating programs for teens but would intentionally incorporate an LGBTQIA+ component to ensure inclusivity across all gender identities and sexual orientations.

The proposed timeline is midterm, with implementation expected within 6 to 12 months. The estimated cost is moderate and would vary depending on whether the program is delivered per school or through partner organizations.

- **LGBTQIA+ Domestic Violence Resource Guide**

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed the development of a countywide LGBTQIA+ domestic violence resource guide. The proposed guide would be multilingual, easy to navigate, and available both electronically and in a flyer format. The flyer would direct individuals to a website or digital platform where the full guide could be accessed. This recommendation is considered short-term (within six months) and low-cost, particularly if the primary focus is digital distribution with limited printed materials.

The guide would serve to compile and centralize domestic violence resources specifically for LGBTQIA+ survivors. A key point of discussion was whether such a targeted repository already exists. If not, Co-Chair Oriadha suggested starting from any existing general domestic violence resource list and re-vetting organizations to ensure they are adequately prepared and affirming in their service to LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Ms. Wethers-Coggins expressed strong support for a one-stop, easily accessible digital resource, potentially organized through QR codes on physical cards and flyers. The importance of ensuring visibility and inclusion across all service providers was emphasized, especially for agencies that are not LGBTQIA+ specific but wish to demonstrate they are safe and affirming.

Outreach strategies such as tabling at festivals and community events were discussed as effective ways to disseminate resource cards and engage individuals in affirming, accessible environments, especially for those who may prefer to seek support in D.C. due to more visible LGBTQIA+ spaces.

Ms. Wethers-Coggins revisited the topic of school-based inclusivity training. She mentioned the “Welcoming Schools” program as a resource, and Prince George’s County Public Schools were noted as having participated in some introductory training. However, concerns were raised about the lack of a comprehensive rollout across schools.

Co-Chair Oriadha shared her involvement in previously advocating for related legislation, which was funded in a subsequent year, but reiterated that widespread implementation remains incomplete.

- **Identify Next Steps**

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed preparation for finalizing and voting on recommendations that will be included in the official report to be presented to the County Council and County Executive. Members were asked to be especially mindful during the remaining meetings, as the group approaches the conclusion of its work.

Members were encouraged to submit any outstanding questions or information requests as soon as possible to ensure timely responses. Additionally, members were reminded to bring forward any remaining recommendations they wish to see included in the final report. A full review of each subgroup's section will take place at the final meeting, and this will serve as the last opportunity to introduce or revise recommendations before submission.

- **Next Meeting Date**

May 16, 2025 @ 2:00 p.m.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:45 p.m.