

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
EMERGENCY ROOM WAIT TIME TASK FORCE
September 15, 2025

- **Members Present**

Wala Blegay, Council Member, Chair
Ashanti Martinez, Delegate, Maryland General Assembly
Marina Anwuri, Community Member
Jeffrey Cooper, Community Member
Caroline “Caro” Williams-Pierce, Community Member
Bill Miller, Urgent Care
Erica Turner, Special Assistant to the DCAO for Health, Human Services & Education, Office of County Executive
Karmen Walker Brown, Associate Vice President, Government Relations, Adventist Healthcare
Laura Ogle, DNP, CENP, CNE, CEN, Director of Nursing & Professional Development, MedStar Southern Maryland Hospital Center
Erin Smith, MD, FACEP, Assistant Chief, Acute Care Services, Permanente Medicine

- **Members Absent:**

Dr. Reginald Brown, Hospital Representative, Luminis Health Doctors Community Medical Center
Jibran Eubanks, SEIU 1199
Terrell Buckson, Assistant Fire Chief
Dr. Tomeka Archinard, Emergency Room Physician, Capital Region Medical Center
Augustin Amara, Service Employee, SEIU 1199
Zynab Faye, Union Nurse, SEIU 1199
Thelmetria Michaelides, Fire Chief
Travis Rickert, Major, Prince George’s Police Department
Sheriff John Carr, Office of the Sheriff
Jeff Kurcab, Interim CEO, Greater Baden Medical Services
Angela Jones Jackson, COO, Greater Baden Medical Services

- **Staff Present**

Jashawn Stewart, Committee Director Supervisor
Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director
Anya Makarova, Senior Advisor to the Board of Health
Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney
Rhonda Riddick, Committee Assistant, HHSPS

- **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

The meeting began with introductions. Chair Blegay introduced herself first, then invited the other participants to do the same in turn.

After the introduction, Chair Blegay noted the group's focus on finalizing recommendations and mentioned a recent WAMU article about the Task Force, which she will share with members. She then turned the discussion over to Anya to begin reviewing the draft report, starting with input from the hospital representatives whose sections are still being finalized.

- Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chair Blegay made a motion, seconded by Laura Ogle, to approve the minutes as presented.

- **Review and Discussion Draft Report**
Anya Makarova, Senior Advisor to the Board of Health

Anya provided a brief walkthrough of the draft report, noting that it had already been reviewed in detail at the previous meeting. Anya also pointed out the need for additional information and input from hospital representatives and other members to complete the findings and recommendations.

During her overview of the draft report, Anya focused on the outstanding information still needed to complete it, specifically, updated and verified data from hospitals, including staffing details, ED best practices, multi-year trends for licensed acute care beds, hospital occupancy data, ED treatment spaces, urgent care facility distribution, and alternative EMS transport destinations.

Population-level data on social determinants of health, health equity, and linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as feedback from hospitals regarding funding practices and policies that may affect healthcare equity is also needed for the report, as well as additional input from state and local stakeholders to clarify roles and responsibilities in reducing wait times, including potential strategies for Fire/ EMS, mobile integrated healthcare, telehealth, nurse navigation, and the Office of Homeland Security's 911 center. Anya is also monitoring upcoming reports and legislation, such as HSCRC findings and safe staffing legislation, to incorporate official, finalized data once available.

Anya wrapped up her overview by noting that the current draft now includes a recommendations section, which is new since the last meeting.

- **Q&A**

Bill Miller cautioned against relying on COVID-era data, noting it can be misleading. He stressed that the report should not only identify problems like provider shortages and ED overuse but also explain the underlying causes, many of which are tied to financial and regulatory barriers. He emphasized that low Medicaid reimbursement rates and slow approvals for new

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urgent care centers make it difficult to expand services, which in turn drives more patients to the ED.

Chair Blegay agreed that the role of payers needs closer examination, since hospitals have also raised this concern. She suggested forming questions to bring payers into the conversation and emphasized looking at whether more primary and specialty care is needed, noting that lack of access and coverage often pushes people to use the ED instead.

Anya noted that the Board of Health will soon examine barriers to primary care. She stressed the importance of equity, pointing out that state measures often ignore how far County residents must travel for care, putting Prince George's at a disadvantage.

Delegate Ashanti Martinez stressed the importance of including in the report the impact of upcoming Medicaid cuts, noting that many Prince George's residents will be affected. He shared that he recently discussed this issue with service providers and Senator Van Hollen and offered to connect the Task Force with key contacts if needed. His main point was to ensure the report reflects these challenges when addressing payers and related stakeholders.

Mr. Jeffrey Cooper suggested that the County should move from reacting to redesigning the systems so emergency rooms are no longer the first stop for inequality, but a safety net within a healthier community.

Mr. Cooper emphasized that addressing social determinants of health and equity should be the foundation of the Task Force's work. He recommended developing an agreement with health systems to ensure quality, accessible, and affordable care and suggested involving outside experts to help guide solutions.

Ms. Caroline Williams-Pierce asked about non-County EDs frequently used by Prince George's County residents. She wanted to know whether these EDs have higher bed occupancy rates or if residents are simply experiencing long wait times. She referenced the draft report's data, including the special request HSCRC data, and noted that ED volume and wait times can vary depending on multiple factors.

Anya highlighted the complexity of analyzing ER and hospital capacity for County residents, particularly since many seek care outside Prince George's County, including D.C. and Virginia, where data is limited. Existing data may underestimate residents' needs, especially regarding equity and access, and presenting the information in a clear, comprehensive way is challenging.

Ms. Karmen Walker Brown asked how best to share information, whether to start commenting on the preliminary draft now, to send hospital-specific data, or to wait until the final report is compiled.

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Anya stressed the importance of maintaining a consistent narrative. She pointed out that state leaders do not currently see adding more hospital beds as a solution to ED overcrowding. Because of this, it is critical to use evidence and hospital feedback in the report to ensure all hospitals are aligned in their meetings.

Ms. Walker Brown highlighted the seriousness of hospital capacity issues and warned that progress will stall if the narrative minimizing capacity concerns continues. She stressed that Prince George's County plays a major role in the state's hospital overcrowding problem. Because there aren't enough hospital beds in the County, patients spill over into surrounding areas, which clogs the entire system.

Anya emphasized that advocacy and a unified message will be crucial. If the state doesn't recognize capacity as an issue, funding and reimbursement models won't change. She noted that ER reimbursement rates for Prince George's County hospitals are often lower than the state average, showing inequities in the system. Some hospitals have even been denied requests for additional capacity through the Certificate of Need process. They asked for help connecting the dots and gathering evidence so the county's case can be clearly and strongly presented.

- **Identify Next Steps**

- Ensure hospital input on key sections of the draft report, particularly staffing and staff performance measures.
- Convene a smaller meeting with hospital representatives and Ms. Turner from the County Executive's Office.
- Follow up with Mr. Miller and the hospitals to arrange a meeting.
- Delegate Martinez will assist with connecting the Task Force to leadership and relevant stakeholders.
- Mr. Cooper may possibly provide additional written comments regarding social determinants of health.
- Continue waiting for state data and plan to analyze it once received.
- Encourage Task Force members to share feedback as soon as possible, though hospitals may wait until the smaller meeting if needed.
- Circulate a more complete draft report to the entire Task Force, not just for discussion at a meeting, but fully disseminated for review and comments.
- Incorporate feedback and move toward final edits of the report.
- Provide the draft individually upon request, with the full report to be shared once it is more complete.

Anya said that while the draft report will be shared once it is more refined, anyone who wants to review it now is welcome to volunteer.

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- **Next Meeting**

October 6, 2025 @ 6:00 p.m.

- **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:35 p.m.