

# Faith-based group lobbies for Howard politicians' support

## Funding for seniors' in-home care, youth jobs among top priorities

November 10, 2011|By Jessica Anderson, The Baltimore Sun

State lawmakers from Howard County say they're pushing the state to shift spending from senior institutionalized care to programs that allow residents to remain in their homes as long as possible.

Several delegates said at a community meeting last week that they would discuss the matter with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Joined by County Executive Ken Ulman and County Councilwoman Courtney Watson, the lawmakers also agreed to look for ways to create more youth conservation jobs in a program that will manage storm-water runoff.

Ulman, Watson and the four Democratic delegates — Shane Pendergrass, Elizabeth Bobo, Guy Guzzone, and Frank Turner — pledged to make the issues a top priority at a Tuesday night event held by the faith-based group People Acting Together in Howard, or PATH. The group selected the issues after discussions with members of local congregations.

At the Tuesday night meeting, the Rev. Craig Sparks spoke to the crowd at Oakland Mills Interfaith Center about the difficulties that arose when his elderly parents did not want to leave the comforts of their home or lose their independence.

"That makes a huge difference in their life," he said of their ability to remain in their home.

Sparks, of Columbia United Christian Church, recalled when his father returned home from the hospital and uttered the word "home." Sparks said, "We need to extend that to all people who need it."

The state spends 85 percent of Medicaid funding on institutionalized nursing home care and 15 percent on in-home and community-based care, said Charles Milligan, deputy state secretary for health care financing. He said the department is working to educate those in institutionalized care on how to receive home care, and also hopes to improve pay for in-home providers as a way of creating more options.

Pendergrass, a member of the House Health and Government Operations Committee, said she helped organize a meeting next month with state Secretary of Health Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, saying it was important to get funding "balanced."

PATH — which pushed for and secured state legislation last year to protect mobile home residents against developers looking to build on their land — also asked the delegates and Ulman to lobby for statewide support for their efforts to reduce storm-water runoff and employ teens in the effort.

Storm water from streets and sidewalks carries pollutants into the waterways that feed into the Chesapeake Bay.

Terry Cummings, with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, spoke before the crowd, saying, "We may never get a better opportunity in cleaning up our waters than now."

Ulman, a Democrat, said the county has put aside \$10 million to reduce storm-water runoff and comply with state and federal requirements. He agreed to lobby other county executives in the state to secure funding for storm-water protection, but he recognized it would be a challenge.

"There's a lot who don't think we should be doing this," he said.

While Howard officials created a youth conservation corps to hire teens this summer, PATH asked county officials to help expand programs statewide.

Watson, a Democrat, said she would meet with local businesses to advocate for paid summer jobs for teens.

Several students stood up and spoke of fruitless quests to find jobs at local retailers or fast-food restaurants.

Kiara James, a student at Howard Community College, said she has looked for more than two years but has been able to find only part-time baby-sitting jobs in the summer, leaving her resume bare as she prepares to start her career.

"These aren't simple problems. They take organized power," said PATH Co-Chairman Guy Moody of St. John United Methodist Presbyterian Church.

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