

**WORKSESSION**

**MEMORANDUM**

April 9, 2019

TO: Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee  
Public Safety (PS) Committee

FROM: Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst *LmMc*  
Susan Farag, Legislative Analyst *SF*

SUBJECT: **Worksession: FY20 Operating Budget**  
**Monitored Exchange and Supervised Visitation Center**

PURPOSE: Update and recommendations on FY20 Budget

***Those expected to attend this worksession:***

Vickie Buckland, Acting Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)  
Dr. Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services (DHHS)  
Erika Finn-Lopez, Office of Management and Budget

**Background**

As a part of its FY18 budget actions, the Council approved funding for the Department of Health and Human Services budget to open a monitored exchange and supervised visitation center. The center provides a safe place for parents to exchange custody of their children in accordance with custody and visitation agreements and, when needed, to supervise visits on-site between a parent and child/children so that the parent may continue to bond with their child without the stress of interacting with the other parent. The Safe Passages Center is located in Rockville and operates 28 hours per week. Family Services, Inc. is the County's contractual partner that provide the services.

**Budget:**

The Executive is recommending level funding for this program in FY20. The HHS Committee will discuss the issue of providing an inflationary adjustment to DHHS contracts with non-profit organizations. If an adjustment is approved, the contract with Family Services should be eligible for such an adjustment.

Description	FY19 Budget	FY20 Budget
Family Services, Inc. Contract	375,598	375,598
Security Guard Services	65,258	65,258
Utility Costs and other	1,882	1,882
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>442,738</b>	<b>442,738</b>

**Use of the Safe Passages Center:**

DHHS has provided information on the use of the Safe Passages Center. Last spring, the center had only been opened for a brief time. However, what can be seen is that in February 2018 there were 48 supervised visitations and in February 2019 this had increased by 75% to 84.

	February 2018	February 2019	Dec 2018 to June 20 19	July 2018 to February 2019
Supervised Visitation	48	84	355	645

Monitored exchange use has also increased substantially as the center has become fully operational.

	February 2018	February 2019	Dec 2018 to June 20 19	July 2018 to February 2019
Monitored Exchange	40	115	377	1,114

The following provides information on the cases assigned by the District and Circuit Courts.

FY2018 Dec-Jun	District Court	Circuit Court
Supervised Visitation	74*	
Monitored Exchange	38*	
FY2019 Jul-Feb	District Court	Circuit Court
Supervised Visitation	34	41
Monitored Exchange	22	12

\*District Court and Circuit Court data was collected in a consolidated manner.

## Request for Expansion of Hours

Councilmembers Albornoz, Rice, Glass, Katz and Hucker (and perhaps others) received an e-mail from CourtWatch saying that there are now waiting lists for supervised visitation (©1).

DHHS has confirmed for Council staff that there are currently ten families in the wait list. These are families with Protective Orders for domestic violence, from both District and Circuit Courts.

CourtWatch is requesting the Council add \$133,000 to increase the hours of operation from 28 to 38. They say that these funds would cover the cost of a supervised visitation monitor, an intake worker, and adding a room divider to create an additional space.

DHHS has provided the following table that would be its recommendation on structuring additional hours if the Council provides additional funding. (Please note that DHHS is not recommending additional funding per the Executive's recommended budget.)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Current Hours of Operation</b>	Closed	5 to 8 pm	5 to 8 pm	Closed	12 to 8 pm	12 to 6 pm	12 to 8 pm
<b>Proposed Hours of Operation</b>	Closed	4 to 8 pm	2 to 8 pm	4 to 8 pm	12 to 8 pm	12 to 8 pm	12 to 8 pm
<b>Additional Hours</b>		1	3	4		2	

DHHS has told Council staff that the \$133,000 is only the cost of the additional hours for the Family Services contract and does not cover the additional security or the cost to partition a large room to make an additional visitation room. The best estimate for security is \$23,310 and a facility estimate would be needed from the Department of General Services (DGS).

### Council staff recommendation

**Council staff recommends adding \$175,000 to the reconciliation list as a placeholder for expanding the hours of the center. If the Joint Committee agrees, staff will refine the estimate with the Sheriff (security) and DGS.**

CourtWatch discussed the need to plan for an additional center. Council staff agrees that it is a good idea to begin to look at the use patterns at the center. Where are people coming from? What hours are most heavily used? Is another location needed and, if so, where is the priority location? Council staff recommends the Council ask for a written update on usage in early December so that there is time to consider what next steps may be prior to the Executive's recommended FY21 budget.

Hello Councilmembers Albornoz, Rice, Glass, Katz and Hucker,

Montgomery County was right two years ago when it recognized the serious gap in the safety net for families struggling with domestic violence and/or high conflict divorce/custody cases and funded the Safe Passage Center to provide supervised visits and monitored exchanges.

Safe Passage Center is now running waiting lists for supervised visits.

Although the Safe Passage Center was cited as a county initiative in the HHS portion of the County Executive's FY 2020 budget, no additional funding was added to meet the demand created by Montgomery County Circuit and District Court judges using this valuable new county resource. It's up to you now.

After one year of successful program operations, the Safe Passage Center is at or near capacity for supervised visits for children of parents with protective orders or high conflict custody/divorce cases.

Waiting lists for supervised visits are in place. The county risks losing the momentum of District and Circuit Court judges using this valuable safety service as the families' access to such visits will be delayed.

A stop gap measure for the upcoming year to increase capacity for supervised visits exists. By increasing the hours of operation from 28 to 38, adding a supervised visitation monitor and intake worker, and building a room divider, additional capacity for supervised visits can be provided. Family Services Inc. puts the price tag at about \$133k over current spending.

Our preference longer-term is to extend services to Germantown or Silver Spring; these additional funds could be viewed as a one time expense, with some portion of the additional personnel and hours potentially moved to a new site in the following year.

We welcome talking with you about this in more detail in the coming days, but we wanted to alert you to the importance of the current situation. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or we can be helpful.

Thanks,

Laurie

Laurie Duker

Co-Founder and Executive Director, Court Watch Montgomery

c (240) 606-6620

[www.courtwatchmontgomery.org](http://www.courtwatchmontgomery.org)

<https://twitter.com/dvcourtwatch>

[www.facebook.com/CWMont/](http://www.facebook.com/CWMont/)

Sign up for monthly Court Watch newsletters!

