

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
777 North Capitol Street NE
Washington, DC 20002

Date: November 5, 2008

To: COG Board of Directors

From: David Robertson, Executive Director

Subject: Policy Committee Reorganization, Resolution R63-08

Recommendation

I recommend that the COG Board of Directors adopt Resolution R63-08, reorganizing and merging the Human Services Policy Committee and Public Safety Policy Committee, effective January 14, 2009 and soliciting 2009 appointments from COG member jurisdictions for the merged committee. The incoming COG Board Chairman will also appoint 2009 leadership for the new Human Services and Public Safety Policy Committee on that date. Reorganization will improve policy and program integration, reduce committee-related expenses at a time of constrained revenue, and foster more efficient and effective use of member time.

Background

COG has a long-history of supporting a diverse and active work program in several human service and public safety issues. Some of these program activities have been among the most popular and effective at COG and have garnered strong support from elected and appointed officials. Human service and public safety program activities have also been subject to greater change than some programs at COG, responding to the evolving needs of member governments and the level of discretionary COG revenue and grant funding to support program activities.

The policy and program committee structure at COG has periodically been modified to respond to these new conditions. For many years, COG retained two separate policy committees on health/human services and on public safety. For a period of time in the 1990s, COG merged the committees. Following the expansion of COG's emergency preparedness and response activities in 2002, the policy committees were separated.

Rationale for Reorganization

Both the Human Services Policy Committee and the Public Safety Policy Committee have engaged in focused and effective work this year under the leadership of Councilmember Tommy Wells, District of Columbia and Councilmember Terry Seamens, City of Takoma Park, respectively. The Human Services Committee focused on housing policy issues in 2008, adding to COG's knowledge and body of work in the area of homelessness and foreclosure; while the Public Safety Policy Committee has begun a multi-year effort centered on youth violence.

Although the proposed merged committee is expected to retain the ability to work on a fairly wide-range of policy issues, many of the topics potentially before the committee would benefit from greater integration of human services and public safety perspectives. The Police Chiefs

Committee specifically stressed the importance of human services issues when it discussed the youth violence issue with Public Safety Policy Committee leadership.

Other issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, impaired driving all may benefit from a more holistic and integrated policy approach. Additionally, as policy input on homeland security has shifted to the National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness Council (EPC), non-emergency planning public safety issues have not always garnered the attention they merit. The proposed reorganization will sharpen the new committee's focus on community-oriented public safety issues such as gang violence and fire safety.

FY 2009 and FY 2010 are likely to be the most fiscally challenging period for COG and its member governments in more than a decade. Apart from the significant federal funding that supports COG's homeland security work program largely under the policy guidance of the EPC and the Chief Administrative Officers Committee, most human service and public safety program activities depend on COG general local contributions (membership assessments) and grant funding for support. Both sources of revenue are constrained and likely to remain so in the next few years.

The past two years have seen a modest retrenchment in staffing in these program areas, mostly on the health and human services side and largely achieved by attrition. The proposed committee reorganization and merger will enable COG to more effectively target limited staff resources and reduce direct cost expenses for committee support, such as printing and reproduction, meal and beverage, and parking and transit reimbursement.

Active member participation is critical to COG's mission and success. While COG has generally fostered wider opportunities for participation through a more horizontal policy committee structure, it is essential that policy committee activities achieve "critical mass" through broader participation and that issues are viewed and vetted from the perspective of all member governments, county and city, large and small.

Human Services Policy Committee and Public Safety Policy Committee leadership came forward in 2008 with strong areas of focus. Also, COG management in the Department of Public Safety and Health has made measurable improvement in staff support for both the Human Services Policy Committee and the Public Safety Policy Committee in the past year. Management and staff in the Department of Community Planning and Services also have provided input and support for committee activities. However, member participation has remained modest for most of the year, averaging five or six elected or appointed officials at each of the bi-monthly meetings. I believe the proposed reorganization and merger will afford an opportunity not only for greater program integration and synergy, but to better engage member participation in Committee meetings.

Timing

COG Board action is requested at this time so that the policy board and committee appointment solicitation in December may acknowledge the proposed merger, rather than act after member governments have already made their appointments under the current committee structure. COG management anticipates there may be additional COG committee structure review following Board action on the climate change report and in conjunction with proposed management recommendations on the FY 2009 and FY 2010 work program and budget.