

Briefing Document: Pocomoke City Community Profile

Executive Summary:

This document analyzes demographic and socioeconomic data for Pocomoke City, Maryland, in comparison to Worcester County and the state of Maryland as a whole. The data reveals a city characterized by slow population growth, an aging population, significant racial diversity, lower educational attainment, higher poverty rates, and a reliance on specific industries. These factors highlight both challenges and opportunities for the city's future.

Key Themes and Findings:

1. Population Trends:

- **Slow Growth:** Pocomoke City is experiencing slower population growth than Worcester County and Maryland. "Pocomoke City's estimated 2023 population of 4,360 confirms the city's continued slow growth, a positive but minimal increase compared to Worcester County's more rapid expansion."
- **Declining Growth Rate:** The annual growth rate in Pocomoke City has consistently declined: 0.44% (1990-2000), 0.21% (2000-2010), and 0.03% (2010-2020).
- **Monitoring Needed:** The document emphasizes the importance of continued monitoring to determine the sustainability of any positive fluctuations and to inform local policies. "Future data points will be essential in determining if the slight increase in the city's percentage of the county population is sustainable or if the long-term decline resumes."

2. Age Demographics:

- **Aging Population:** Pocomoke City is experiencing an aging population, with an increasing proportion of residents aged 65 and older. The percentage rose from 15.20% in 2010 to 19.31% in 2023.
- **Out-migration of Youth:** The document suggests a potential difficulty in attracting and retaining young people, which "could impact the workforce and future economic growth."
- **Median Age Disparity:** Significant difference in median age between males (30.2) and females (42.8) in Pocomoke City, suggesting a demographic imbalance.
- **Service Needs:** The aging population necessitates a focus on services for seniors, while the younger median age (compared to the county) suggests a need for youth- and family-oriented services.

3. Gender Distribution:

- **Shifting Gender Ratio:** The gender ratio in Pocomoke City has shifted from a clear female majority in 2010 (55.60%) to a more even split in 2023 (50.89% female). This shift prompts questions about the reasons behind it, such as out-migration of young women or an influx of men.

4. Racial Diversity:

- **Highly Diverse:** Pocomoke City is significantly more racially diverse than Worcester County and the state. White residents make up 47.9%, while Black or African American residents comprise 44.1% of the city's population.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** The report stresses the importance of equity and inclusion, noting that "it also requires a commitment to equity and inclusion in all aspects of community life, ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources for all residents regardless of race or ethnicity."

5. Educational Attainment:

- **Lower Attainment:** Pocomoke City exhibits lower rates of educational attainment compared to Worcester County and Maryland. "Pocomoke City generally exhibits lower rates of educational attainment compared to both Worcester County as a whole and the state of Maryland."
- **Bachelor's Degree Disparity:** The most striking difference is in the attainment of bachelor's degrees or higher, with Pocomoke City showing significantly lower percentages.
- **Poverty and Education:** A correlation exists between poverty and lower educational attainment, reinforcing the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty. "Individuals with less than a high school education have a higher poverty rate compared to those with higher educational levels."
- **Disparities across Racial Groups:** White individuals in Pocomoke City generally have higher rates of high school graduation and bachelor's degrees compared to Black individuals.

6. Household Characteristics:

- **Smaller Households:** Pocomoke City has smaller average household sizes compared to the county and state.
- **Larger Families:** Despite having fewer families overall, Pocomoke City's average family size is larger than Worcester County's.
- **Senior Population:** A larger percentage of households include individuals aged 60 and over and 65 and over compared to the state.
- **Single-Unit Housing:** Pocomoke City primarily consists of single-unit structures.
- **Lower Homeownership:** Homeownership rates are lower, and renter occupancy rates are higher in Pocomoke City compared to the county and state.

7. Income and Poverty:

- **Lower Incomes:** Pocomoke City consistently reports lower income levels (median household income, mean household income, per capita income) compared to Worcester County and Maryland. "Across the board, Pocomoke City consistently reports lower income levels."
- **Income Growth:** Pocomoke City experienced a higher percentage increase in median household income between 2010 and 2023, but income levels remain significantly below the county and state averages.
- **High Poverty Rates:** Pocomoke City faces significantly higher poverty rates than both Worcester County and Maryland. "Pocomoke City faces a significant challenge with poverty rates that are stubbornly higher than both Worcester County and Maryland averages."
- **Vulnerable Groups:** Families with a female householder and no husband present consistently experience the highest poverty rates.
- **Public Assistance:** A significant percentage of Pocomoke households (29.5%) rely on public assistance programs, with female-headed families being particularly reliant.

8. Unemployment:

- **Worcester County Recovery:** Worcester County has shown substantial improvement in unemployment rates since 2020, but rates have generally remained higher than most other Eastern Shore counties and the state average.

9. Industry and Occupation:

- **Key Industries:** The dominant sectors in Pocomoke City are Educational services, health care and social assistance, Public administration, and Retail trade.
- **Concentration in Public Administration:** Pocomoke City exhibits a higher concentration of employment in public administration compared to both the county and the state.
- **Occupational Differences:** Pocomoke City has a smaller share of employment in management, business, science, and arts occupations and a larger proportion in service occupations compared to the county and state.

10. Commuting Patterns:

- **Reliance on Personal Vehicles:** A significantly higher proportion of Pocomoke City residents rely on personal vehicles for their commute.
- **Limited Transportation Alternatives:** Public transportation usage is low, and walking and biking are virtually nonexistent as commuting modes in Pocomoke City.
- **Longer Commute Times:** Pocomoke City residents have longer commute times on average compared to Worcester County.
- **Work Outside County:** A substantial portion of Pocomoke City Residents work outside of the county.

Implications and Recommendations:

- **Economic Development:** Focus on diversifying the local economy, attracting higher-paying jobs, and promoting workforce training programs.
- **Education:** Invest in education and address the skills gap, particularly in higher-skilled occupations.
- **Poverty Reduction:** Implement targeted interventions and support systems, such as job training, affordable housing, and improved access to healthcare. Provide specific support to female-headed households.
- **Transportation:** Improve transportation infrastructure and explore alternative commuting modes, including public transportation and pedestrian/cycling options.
- **Community Services:** Provide comprehensive community services to meet needs of a diverse population, including senior services, youth programs, and family support.
- **Further Analysis:** Conduct further analysis to understand the root causes of poverty, educational disparities, and other challenges facing Pocomoke City.