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Executive Secretaries & Executive Directors

Robert Lovelace: June 1960 - November 1961
Bill Ratchford: November 1961 - October 1962
Thomas Kelly: October 1962 - January 1964
Bill Ratchford: January 1964 - November 1968
Joe Murnane: November 1968 - May 1978
Wallace "Wally" Hutton: October 1978 - July 1981
Althea "Tee" O'Connor: September 1981 - August 1985
Raquel Sanudo: June 1985 - June 1991
David Bliden: July 1991 - Present

Since the first Executive Director was hired in 1960, the men and women who have held that position have come from varied career backgrounds. The responsibilities of the position have changed and duties have been expanded and diversified. Similarly, the MACo staff has grown, from the charter staff of Executive Secretary Lovelace and a stenographer, to the seven staff members who serve the organization today. Each Executive Director has not only redefined the position, but, along with his or her staff, has helped to shape and develop MACo itself.

Robert Lovelace

As discussed in the previous chapter, Robert Lovelace, a former city manager, began his duties with the Association upon the establishment of the Symons Hall office beginning June 1, 1960. Per the agreement with the University of Maryland, he joined their staff as a lecturer in American Government. As the first Executive Secretary, as it was then called, Lovelace set the pace and provided a basic structure for those that would come after him. As is the case today, in 1960 the SACCOM Board was made up of county officials for whom Association service was only one aspect of their responsibilities; Lovelace was the first person involved with the organization that could focus wholly on its development. With his appointment as Executive Secretary, and the subsequent hiring of a part-time stenographer, came a unity to the organization: a headquarters office, publications, and someone dedicated to researching issues and drafting documents. However, after serving little more than a year, Lovelace resigned effective September 30, 1961, returning to a previous position in Tennessee. The hunt for an Executive Secretary began again.

Bill Ratchford: Part One

William S. Ratchford, II was hired as the Acting Executive Secretary in November 1961. Ratchford was a former Air Force Lieutenant and University of Maryland graduate assistant in the University's Bureau of Governmental Research. He served the Association temporarily for 11 months while the search for a permanent Executive Secretary continued.

Thomas Kelly and Bill Ratchford: Part Two

In October 1962, Thomas C. Kelly was hired as Executive Secretary. Like his predecessor Lovelace, Kelly was a University of Maryland lecturer in the Government and Politics Department. Serving for less than two years, Executive Secretary Kelly left the position in January 1964. Former Acting Executive Secretary Bill Ratchford, hearing of the impending resignation, notified the Association in November 1963 of his interest in resuming the position permanently. He had been working with the Municipal Technical Advisory Service of the University of Maryland's Bureau of Governmental Research and earning a master's degree in political science at the University. The Board rehired him as Executive Secretary effective on the very day that Kelly resigned, January 10, 1964.

Ratchford was instrumental in SACCOM's big move from the University of Maryland campus to the State Capital, mentioned earlier. As Executive Secretary, Ratchford was more interested in building the organization than in becoming a lobbyist, and recalls that, "I'm not a salesman; I couldn't sell snow shovels to Eskimos." His commitment to the counties and his focus on keeping them unified developed the role of Executive Secretary from one of a helper to one of a leader among county officials.

1965 Ford Custom Two-Door Sedan

At the 1964 Summer Conference, the Board of Directors also approved the purchase of an Association automobile, given that the Executive Secretary traveled approximately 9,000 miles annually and it would be less expensive than to reimburse him at \$.10 per mile. That fall, President and Prince George's County Council member Jesse S. Baggett authorized Ratchford to purchase a 1965 Ford Custom two-door sedan "with a radio, seat belts, and tinted windshield at a price not to exceed \$2,200." The Board also increased Ratchford's salary \$100 to \$4,915, the Association's fifty percent share.

Ratchford left the organization again in November 1968 to head a component of the Maryland Department of Fiscal Services and later replaced Paul Cooper as Executive Director of the Department. At a reception and dinner given by the Association upon his departure, Ratchford and his wife, Nancy, were given his office chair with an engraved plaque, a silver engraved tray, and a decanter. When interviewed for this history, Ratchford condensed his experience with MACo into one simple statement: "I liked running the organization. It was fun."

Joe Murnane

Twelve persons were interviewed for the position after Ratchford departed, and ultimately Joseph J. Murnane was offered the position in November 1968. Prior to that, he worked with the Baltimore Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce as Legislative Director. Joe Murnane had a substantial role in gaining the high level of respect that MACo enjoys in Annapolis today. Many of his colleagues then and now regard Murnane himself with great admiration. His predecessor Ratchford remembers that, "Joe Murnane was the person that made MACo into the lobbying force that it was... I think I could take credit for building the organization, [and give] credit to Joe for making it a lobbying organization. He showed [counties] what they could do." Former Governor William Donald Schaefer, who was President of the Baltimore City Council, and later Mayor of Baltimore, remembers that Murnane was "smart, a diplomat, a great leader. Totally dedicated."

During his ten years with the organization, Murnane was curiously granted a leave of absence by the MACo Board of Directors to run the gubernatorial campaign of Marvin Mandel. Mandel and Murnane had become good friends when Mandel was Speaker of the House. Former Governor Mandel remembered, "I asked him to do it because he had a lot of integrity and he had a lot of respect amongst the legislators and members of the State Government." Former Senator Jack Cade was a member of the MACo Board of Directors at the time and opposed granting Murnane that leave of absence. Executive Director David Bliden recalled later asking former Governor Mandel how MACo fared at the following General Assembly Session. Mandel dryly responded, "Counties did very well."

The Board's approval of Murnane's involvement in partisan politics was a significant point in Association history; MACo has evolved since that time and now regards itself as non-partisan, which current Director Bliden believes is vital to the legislative success of the organization. "To work with the full gamut of General Assembly members, you don't want to be perceived as partisan – it can shut doors. By being non partisan, MACo is viewed as solely policy driven – very important." Such a leave of absence would not likely be granted again given MACo's current non-partisan policy.

Murnane lived in Baltimore City while he served as Executive Director. Former MACo staff member Mavis Spence remembers that Murnane took the Greyhound bus to and from work in Annapolis. Avoiding having to cope with traffic wasn't the issue for Murnane; he did not have a driver's license. In 1965 Spence began to teach him how to drive a car. "He'd never left Baltimore City and didn't have a need to drive. I trained Joe in a Ford Mustang," said Spence.

Joe Murnane served as Executive Secretary of the Association until his death in May 1978, following a long battle with stomach cancer. The funeral was held in Baltimore and he was buried in Princess Anne in Somerset County. Former Wicomico County Administrator Matt Creamer remembers that an Eastern Shore policeman arranged for a police escort to lead the miles long funeral procession "from the Kent Island end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to the cemetery." In a resolution issued during the 1978 Summer Conference, the MACo Board of Directors credited Murnane with bringing "integrity and candor to the political scene in an era of public distrust and disgust," and "[giving us] more than we could ever return."

The Board of Directors appointed Wallace E. Hutton as Executive Secretary in 1978 after the Association screened nearly 70 applications and interviewed seven candidates. Hutton joined the Association as Executive Secretary on October 1.

"Wally" Hutton

Former Frederick County Commissioner and Delegate "Wally" Hutton served two years as Executive Secretary, resigning as of July 11, 1981. Governor William Donald Schaefer, president of MACo in 1980, admits that he and Hutton "had many differences that year." Hutton, following Murnane as Executive Director, had "big shoes to fill," according to former MACo President Frank Francois.

Althea “Tee” O’Connor

Althea J. "Tee" O'Connor joined the organization in 1979 as Assistant Executive Secretary. She was hired as Huttons' replacement in September 1981. There was debate among the Board members over whether O'Connor would be able to do the job. Past MACo President John O'Rourke, who was President during O'Connor's tenure, said that there were several "conservative male chauvinists" on the Board who doubted her abilities because she was a woman, and doubted her commitment level, since she had children. After Hutton left, O'Rourke remembers telling the Board, "not only is Tee doing her job, but she is also doing [Hutton's] job, and raising those [six] kids, and has never once asked for extra time... [It's] time we gave it a shot." They did give her the opportunity, and O'Connor held the position through the 1985 Summer Conference. She graciously provided some overlap in the transition to the new Executive Director, Raquel Sanudo, who began in June 1985.

During that time the five member staff was responsible for planning and staffing affiliate conferences and the Winter and Summer Conferences for all MACo members. In addition, the staff was also responsible for annually researching and publishing both the *Budget and Tax Rate Survey* and the *Salary Survey*; regularly writing, printing, and distributing *Courthouse News*; and researching bills and advocating county positions with the legislature and Governor's office. Prior to purchasing the first computer in 1984, all of these tasks, including conference registration, were done manually.

Each year Tee and the MACo President attempted to visit the elected officials in each county and Baltimore City, often traveling with the current Lieutenant Governor, either Sam Bogley or Joe Curran. These trips provided an important opportunity to discuss issues informally and to forge a positive relationship with the Lieutenant Governor as a proponent for local government concerns.

Raquel Sanudo

Executive Director Raquel Sanudo had been the Executive Assistant to the Howard County Executive prior to becoming MACo's Executive Director. During her tenure, the MACo office grew to include six members, the Board grew to 15 members, and the Correctional Officers were added to the list of affiliate groups for a total of seven affiliates.

In what proved to be one of Sanudo's most challenging years, MACo experienced a rapid succession of presidents— four in a twelve-month period. Howard County Executive J. Hugh Nichols was president when she was hired, then resigned to take a position out of State. His successor George R. Aud resigned from the St. Mary's County Board of Commissioners during his presidency. Shortly thereafter, new President Frank J. Hutchins died of cancer. Finally, MACo Treasurer, Prince George's County Council member, and later Governor, Parris Glendening was installed as president. He completed that year, and served a full term the following year.

Sanudo had significant experience with Maryland politics, and, despite the "unstabilizing" effects of the rapidly changing leadership that first year, and her own admission that "it was not my best performance during that time" she had strong support from the Board of Directors and continued to serve as Executive Director for another four years, through June 1991.

Sanudo and MML Executive Director Jon Burrell are credited with the establishment of the Local Government Insurance Trust. Sanudo also oversaw the “retiring of the mortgage” on 169 Conduit Street. It should be noted that she was the last Executive Director of the Association responsible for conference management and publications in addition to other management and legislative responsibilities. Since that time, MACo staff responsibilities have shifted and diversified. Sanudo is currently the Chief Administrative Officer for Howard County and chairs the Local Government Insurance Trust Board of Trustees.

David Bliden

Interest in the high profile position of MACo Executive Director intensified as the Board began to sift through 127 applicants for the position after Sanudo resigned that summer. A familiar face in local government and active in MACo affairs, having served in the Prince George’s County Office of Law and the Anne Arundel County Office of Law as Attorney and Legislative Liaison, David S. Bliden was selected as Executive Director that July. Bliden had become involved in MACo activities when he worked with the Prince George’s County Office of Law, participating in many MACo attorney affiliate activities, and speaking at conferences on tort reform. He was the first non-county attorney to be president of the Maryland Association of County Civil Attorneys, serving then as Anne Arundel Deputy County Attorney. In fact, the affiliate changed its bylaws to enable him to serve as president.

The longest-serving Executive Director to date, Bliden is already credited by staff and MACo members alike with refining the Association’s legislative bill review and position process, developing staff positions for higher levels of service, and championing the use of modern technology in the MACo office. “He realized that in the MACo office, it was time to go to the computers, rearrange the office structure. He gets good marks from me on that,” said MACo Past President and former Wicomico County Council President Henry Parker.

As of January 2003, there are a total of seven full time staff members: the Executive Director, the Legislative Director, the Communications and Meetings Director, the Associate Director, the Office Financial Manager, the Administrative Specialist, and Office Assistant. A part-time permanent research/administrative assistant was hired two years ago for full time work during Session and part-time work during the interim. Just prior to, and during Conferences, the Association utilizes other support assistance.