



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 12, 2023

TO: Consumer Protection Commission

FROM: Rebecca L. Makely, Director ^{DS} *RLM*
Department of Cable and Consumer Services

SUBJECT: Consumer Protection Commission Meeting for December 19, 2023

Please find attached the Consumer Protection Commission meeting packet. The next scheduled meeting is **Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. in Conference Room 232** of the Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia.

Please RSVP with your attendance to Susan Jones by COB on Monday, December 18, 2023, at Susan.Jones@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-5877.

Enclosures

cc: Ellicia Seard-McCormick, Deputy County Executive

Susan C. Jones, Consumer Specialist III
Department of Cable and Consumer Services



**FAIRFAX COUNTY
CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMISSION
December 19, 2023 AGENDA**

Call to Order by the Chairperson (7:30 PM)

Remote Participation Motions

Minutes

- Approval of the draft November 28, 2023, meeting minutes

Report of the Director

Old Business

New Business

-

Commissioner Matters

Report of the Chairperson

General Interest

- Consumer Protection Commission Calendar
- Consumer Protection Commission Membership
- CAB Statistics
- Community Outreach
- Consumer Resources

Minutes of the Fairfax County Consumer Protection Commission

November 28, 2023

7:30 PM

Government Center
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035
Chairperson Kratovil, presiding

Attendance:

Commissioners: Belkowitz, Gasimov,
Gulakowski, Kratovil, Rosier, Roark, Springer

Absent:

Commissioner: Freedenthal, Hargraves, Kirk,
Kharat, Svab

Staff:

Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Cable and Consumer Services
Susan C. Jones, Consumer Specialist III
Consumer Affairs Branch
Carl Newcomb, Consumer Specialist III
Regulation and Licensing Branch

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 PM by Chairperson Kratovil.

Minutes

Commissioner Springer moved to accept the October 17, 2023, minutes. Commissioner Gulakowski seconded the motion. The minutes for the October 17, 2023, meeting were adopted unanimously, 7-0-0.

Report of the Chairperson

Chairperson Kratovil had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Matters

Commissioner Gasimov had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Gulakowski complimented staff and Commissioner Rosier for their efforts to recognize former Chairperson John Fee at the November 21, 2023, Board of Supervisors meeting.

Commissioner Roark had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Rosier mentioned her disappointment that some of the Commissioners failed to provide a headshot for the FY 2023 CPC Annual Report.

Commissioner Belkowitz had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Springer had no matter to bring before the Commission.

Chairperson Kratovil spoke briefly about credit repair, ways to make legitimate repairs, and illegal ways that companies use to add extra fees. Chairperson Kratovil stated this might be a topic for the Financial Scams and Fraud Committee to consider.

Report of the Director

Director Makely spoke about recent County elections. Supervisors Gross and Foust decided not to seek reelection. New Board Members Andres Jimenez, Mason District and James “Jimmy” Bierman, Dranesville District were elected. Director Makely stated the Inauguration Ceremony will take place on December 13, 2023. There will be a reception at 5:00 p.m. with the ceremony at 6:00 p.m. at the Fairfax County Government Center Forum. The new Board Members will begin their term on January 1, 2024.

Director Makely stated that Bryan Hill, County Executive, initiated a Board of Supervisors Onboarding for two days to provide a “snapshot” of each department to the new Board Members.

Director Makely informed the Commission that December 5, 2023, is the last Board Meeting of 2023. On December 12, 2023, at the Board Meeting, Channel 16 will be present retirement videos produced for Supervisors Gross and Foust.

Commissioner Rosier asked about security at the Government Center. She came to a meeting at the building and Congressman Connolly was also having a meeting. Commissioner Rosier stated one of the members said there was vehicle rolling in the parking lot outside and felt unsafe. The group left the building. Director Makely stated it is a public building, which means it is open to the public from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Director Makely stated vehicle protests have occurred and if the vehicle maintains a driving pattern in our public parking area, it does not rise to the level that the person would have to make a reservation.

Director Makely stated she met with Deputy County Executive for Safety and Security, Tom Arnold, on Chapter 28.1. He received information from Fairfax County Police Detectives regarding illicit massage practices in Fairfax County. Deputy County Executive Arnold acknowledged the list was deficient. Another meeting has been scheduled for December 4, 2023, and it will be determined whether the Commission can move forward with Chapter 28.1.

Old Business

There was no old business before the Commission.

New Business

1. Charge Up Fairfax Pilot Program. Gina Weil, Climate Mitigation Specialist, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination, spoke on Fairfax County’s GHG Emissions Inventory in 2020, switching to an electric vehicle (EV), the fundamental of charging, EV charging in HOAs, program overview, HOA exploration, Fairfax County’s engagement, HOA implementation, reimbursement grant program, equity considerations, timeline, and how to apply.

A discussion ensued on level 2 charging, multifamily communities’ interest, location of possible charging stations, payment of the service, personal charging stations, grant money available, County’s ability to accommodate all applications, and common amenities allowance for outside use to generate revenue.

2. 2023 Taxicab Biennial Determination Report. Directly Makely presented the staff overview of the 2023 Taxicab Biennial Determination Report which included operator and taxicab certificates required; establishment of public convenience and necessity; taxicab certificates; taxicab demand formula criteria; taxicab demand formula analysis; taxicab company data for total trips, total passengers; and total revenue; and staff recommendation.

A discussion ensued on taxicab demand formula and using the calculation of the average number of trips per certificate. Director Makley responded that the taxicab demand formula results in a recommended fleet size of 378 certificates. However, at this time the taxicab industry has chosen not requested use of all available certificates.

Commissioner Gulakowski moved to accept the staff's recommendation. Commissioner Gasimov seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0-0.

3. Nomination of Officers. Chairperson Kratovil let the Commission know that a slate of candidates were needed for elections to be held in January 2024.

The following slate was established:

Chairperson – Jason Kratovil

Vice-Chairperson – Denis Gulakowski

Secretary – Jaqueline Rosier

Chairperson Kratovil moved to accept the slate of candidates. Commissioner Springer seconded the motion. The motion passed, 6-0-1, with Commissioner Belkowitz abstaining.

Chairperson Kratovil stated without objection he will appoint Commissioner Springer as a Special Designee of Officer Selection.

Chairperson Kratovil let the Commission know that the next meeting is on December 19, 2023, and will reach out to see who is available to attend. He will follow up with staff.

Chairperson Kratovil made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Gulakowski seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:28 PM.

CPC Calendar

Consumer Protection Commission

2023 Planning Calendar

December 19, 2023

- January 17
 - Chapter 28.1
 - 2023 Meeting Calendar
- February 21
 - Resilient Fairfax and CECAP Presentation
 - Election of Officers
 - 2023 Items of Interest
- March 21
 - Authorization to Advertise Public Hearing
- April 18
 - Meeting Cancelled
- May 16
 -
- June 20
 - Virginia Senior Medicare Patrol Presentation by Commissioner Freedenthal
 - BOS Engagement
 - Review draft subcommittee outline
 - Future briefings and activity
 - Open discussion and ideation
- July 18
 - Meeting Cancelled
- August 1
 - FY 2023 Annual Report
 - Identity Theft Resource Center Presentation
- August 15
 - Meeting Cancelled
- September 19
 - FY 2023 Annual Report
- October 17
 -
- November 28
 - Charge Up Fairfax Presentation
 - Nomination of Officers
 - 2023 Taxicab Biennial Determination Report
- December 19
 -

CPC Membership

Commissioners

Fairfax County Resident #1
Jacqueline Rosier (Secretary)
Appt. Expires 7/31/2025

Fairfax County Resident #2
Michael J. Roark
Appt. Expires 7/31/2026

Fairfax County Resident #3
Jason J. Kratovil (Chairperson)
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #4
Dennis D. Kirk
Appt. Expires 7/31/2025

Fairfax County Resident #5
Dirck A. Hargraves
Appt. Expires 7/31/2023

Fairfax County Resident #6
Vacant

Fairfax County Resident #7
Pratik J. Kharat
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #8
Harold G. Belkowitz
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #9
Chester J. Freedenthal
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #10
Josef Gasimov
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #11
Paul Svab
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Fairfax County Resident #12
Denis Gulakowski (Vice-Chairperson)
Appt. Expires 7/31/ 2024

Fairfax County Resident #13
Maurice B. Springer
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

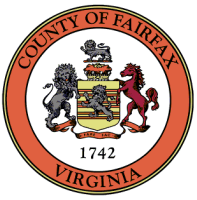
Staff

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Fax Number 703-653-1310
consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov

CAB Statistics



Department of Cable and Consumer Services
Consumer Affairs Branch
Monthly Summary Statistics

11/1/2023 Through 11/30/2023

	Current Month		Fiscal YR to Date	
Cases Received	64		333	
Cases Closed	62		312	
Resolved	44	71%	214	69%
Unresolved	6	10%	25	8%
Referred	6	10%	19	6%
Legal	1	2%	4	1%
Other	5	7%	50	16%
Advice Inquiries Closed	314		1860	
Amount Reclaimed	\$68,408.64		\$297,280.22	

Top Complaint Types

Tenant-Landlord	35%
Housing Services	19%
Automotive	10%
Medical Billing	8%
Communications Media	5%
Others	23%

Community Outreach

Outreach Event Calendar December 2023

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	# of Guests	Event Time	Staff
12/4/2023	Consumer Knowledge	Falls Church High School 7521 Jaguar Trail Falls Church, VA	50	8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	MDP CH
12/5/2023	Consumer Knowledge	Falls Church High School 7521 Jaguar Trail Falls Church, VA	30	8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	MDP CG SW
12/6/2023	Cnsumer Knowledge	South County High School 8501 Silverbrook Road Lorton, VA	70	1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	MDP
12/11/2023	Consumer Knowledge	Westfields High School 4700 Stonecroft Blvd Chantilly, VA		8:00 a.m- 4:00 p.m.	MDP CH
12/12/2023	Consumer Knowledge	Westfields High School 4700 Stonecroft Blvd Chantilly, VA		8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	MDP CH SW
12/18/2023	Consumer Connection Energy Conservation Assistance Program	Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Facebook		11:00 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.	SCJ

Consumer Resources

Resource Items

Fairfax County Department of Cable and Consumer Services
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer>

Fairfax County Consumer Affairs
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/csd/consumer>

Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcountyconsumer/>

Consumer Connection: Northern Virginia Long-Term Ombudsman Program
(November 16, 2023) <https://fb.watch/olZEgAVR0j/>

Information Items

Fairfax supervisors to keep taxi operating certificates stable ([more](#))

Scammers hide harmful links in QR codes to steal your information ([more](#))

Digital Shopping Scams Rose 12% Between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday—Protect Your Money for Remainder of Holiday Season ([more](#))

Fairfax supervisors to keep taxi operating certificates stable

Industry has seen major decline with advent of ride-sharing operators like Uber, Lyft
Brian Trompeter about 21 hours ago



Adobe Stock photo/chalabala.cz

The recent decline in Fairfax County taxicab certificates has been arrested, at least temporarily, as the Board of Supervisors unanimously agreed Dec. 5 to keep the number of certificates available at 150.

Taxicab demand has plummeted at least since 2015, largely due to the advent of transportation-network companies (i.e., ride-sharing services) such as Uber and Lyft. The pandemic also dealt another major blow to cab companies.

County code requires the Board of Supervisors in odd-numbered years to set the number of taxicab certificates available to operators.

Using a weighted formula, county staff in its 2023 analysis determined taxicab demand had declined by about 42 percent. The average number of trips per certificate plunged nearly 85 percent.

2013 was the last year when the number of authorized taxicab certificates increased, for an overall fleet total of 654. That number dropped to 368 in 2019, 280 in 2020, 170 in 2021 and 150 in 2022.

Fairfax County has only one taxicab operator, Old Dominion Transportation Group Inc. Supervisors in January renewed only 130 certificates out of an authorized possible total of 542 for the company, but on Dec. 5 acceded to the firm's request to give it an additional 20 certificates, bringing the total back up to 150.

The certificates will be divided thusly among the company's various divisions: Fairfax Yellow Cab (Murphy Bros. Inc.) 90, Springfield Yellow Cab (Paul Wallace Management Inc.) 35 and Fairfax Red Top (Fairfax Taxi Inc.) 25. Since last year, White Top Cab (King Cab Co. Inc.) has lost its 20 certificates, while EnviroCab, which had 13 certificates in 2013, has had none since 2019.

While ride-sharing services are meeting the needs of many passengers, on-demand taxicabs still perform an important service for people who are unable to use public transportation or who rely on cabs for basic transportation needs, and students with disabilities and special needs, county officials said.

Cabs in 2022 served more than 385,000 people and provided 1,522 wheelchair-accessible trips, officials said. Cab operators with 25 or more certificates must have at least 4-percent of their vehicles be wheelchair-accessible.

Scammers hide harmful links in QR codes to steal your information

By Alvaro Puig, Consumer Education Specialist, December 6, 2023

QR codes seem to be everywhere. You may have scanned one to see the menu at a restaurant or pay for public parking. And you may have used one on your phone to get into a concert or sporting event, or to board a flight. There are countless other ways to use them, which explains their popularity. Unfortunately, scammers hide harmful links in QR codes to steal personal information. Here's what to know.

There are reports of scammers covering up QR codes on parking meters with a QR code of their own. And some crafty scammers might send you a QR code by text message or email and make up a reason for you to scan it. These are some of the ways they try to con you:

- they lie and say they couldn't deliver your package and you need to contact them to reschedule
- they pretend like there's a problem with your account, and you need to confirm your information
- they lie, saying they noticed suspicious activity on your account, and you need to change your password

These are all lies they tell you to create a sense of urgency. They want you to scan the QR code and open the URL without thinking about it.

A scammer's QR code could take you to a spoofed site that looks real but isn't. And if you log in to the spoofed site, the scammers could steal any information you enter. Or the QR code could install malware that steals your information before you realize it.

So how can you protect yourself?

- **If you see a QR code in an unexpected place, inspect the URL before you open it.** If it looks like a URL you recognize, make sure it's not spoofed — look for misspellings or a switched letter.
- **Don't scan a QR code in an email or text message you weren't expecting — especially if it urges you to act immediately.** If you think the message is legitimate, use a phone number or website you know is real to contact the company.
- **Protect your phone and accounts.** [Update your phone's OS](#) to protect against hackers and [protect your online accounts](#) with strong passwords and multi-factor authentication.

Digital Shopping Scams Rose 12% Between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday — Protect Your Money for Remainder of Holiday Season

YAËL BIZOUATI-KENNEDY Updated December 4, 2023 at 2:27 PM



fizkes / Getty Images/iStockphoto

The average incidence of [suspected digital shopping](#) fraud during the Cyber Five days — the days from Thanksgiving, Nov. 23, through Cyber Monday, Nov. 27 — [was up a whopping 12%](#) in the U.S. compared to the rest of the year, according to a new analysis from TransUnion.

This was also 18% higher than the same period in 2022. “The rise is not surprising. Just as the ‘Cyber five’ early shopping holiday period is a peak time for consumers, it

is also an active time period for digital shopping scams, with significantly higher digital fraud attempts during this time period than during the rest of the year,” said Cecilia Seiden, vice president of the retail business at TransUnion.

Seiden attributes this increase to four key drivers. First, the belief in the ability to hide among the masses and more easily evade detection by merchants.

“With higher transactional volume, fraudsters expect retail employees and fraud teams to be more overwhelmed and therefore distracted, enabling account-takeover and fraud to be more easily missed,” she said.

Second, it’s easier to scam consumers when they are already in shopping mode and interacting with merchants. Using a variety of phishing techniques, fraudsters attempt to scam consumers into transacting with them instead of the real merchants.

Third, fraudsters use stolen funds and cards to buy both big and small ticket items to resell on other sites, she added.

Finally, challenging economic conditions drive increased need and opportunity. The TransUnion analysis found that 69% of U.S. consumers said they’re extremely, very or moderately concerned with being victimized by online fraud this holiday season — this is an increase from 64% in 2022.

According to Seiden, consumers are right to be worried, as studies have shown that almost every adult in the U.S. is targeted by a scam on nearly a daily basis. Yet, she also noted that 69% for the U.S. is on the low side globally — the 3rd lowest number of 13 countries surveyed.

“All consumers should be wary and know how to recognize scams, as well as take steps to protect themselves from fraud during online shopping without relying solely on the protections provided by retailers, banks and payment providers,” she said, adding that this is especially critical during the holidays, when big promotions are great bait to lure consumers looking for the best deal — especially during a time with such a high cost of living.

How To Protect Yourself From Fraud

Seiden offered five tips for consumers to protect themselves from fraud during the holiday season:

1. **Shop on sites you know and trust.** “Also, consumers should seek out [retailers and ecommerce sites](#) that utilize security practices such as two-factor authentication to ensure payment information remains protected,” she added.
2. **Have your guard up.** If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

3. **Use unique passwords and multi-factor authentication.** “Use different and strong passwords for [each website](#) — [password managers](#) make this easy and relatively seamless,” she said. “Set up multi-factor authentication when available, typically using your mobile phone or email to receive a one-time passcode.”
4. **Don’t give your personal or financial information in response to a request that you didn’t expect.** If you get an email, phone call, or text message from a retailer prompting you for a response that involves giving personal information, do not answer. “Find the [official customer service website or phone number](#) and initiate contact yourself via a communication channel you know is official and legitimate,” she added.
5. **Monitor your bank and credit card accounts.** Check for any activity you do not recognize.

A Silver Lining

Seiden noted that the reason retailers loosen their fraud controls is because they’re concerned that any friction in the shopping experience will cause the consumer to abandon their purchase.

Yet, she added that if there’s any silver lining to increasing digital fraud, it is that consumers’ perception of security measures is evolving and becoming more favorable.

“We found that 59% of consumers view additional identity validation requirements during the check-out process positively, and only 4% view it negatively, wanting security to be invisible and to be able to complete their purchase quickly,” she said. “What perhaps was previously seen as an inconvenience and adding friction to a purchase, is now increasingly seen as a welcome sign of protection. As consumer perceptions evolve, retailers will be able to mitigate fraud and more effectively protect consumers.”