




County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 11, 2023

TO: Consumer Protection Commission

FROM: Rebecca L. Makely, Director 
Department of Cable and Consumer Services

SUBJECT: Consumer Protection Commission Meeting for April 18, 2023

Please find attached the Consumer Protection Commission meeting packet. The next scheduled meeting is **Tuesday, April 18, 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, April 17, 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
April 18, 2023 AGENDA**

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

Remote Participation Motions

Minutes

- Approval of the draft March 21, 2023, meeting minutes

Report of the Chairperson

Report of the Director

Commissioner Matters

Old Business

New Business

General Interest

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

Minutes of the Fairfax County Consumer Protection Commission

March 21, 2023

7:30 PM
Government Center
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035
Vice Chairperson Gulakowski, presiding

Attendance:

Commissioners: Belkowitz, Gulakowski,
Freedenthal, Hargraves, Kirk, Kharat, Roark,
Springer, Svab

Absent:

Commissioner: Kratovil, O'Savio, Rosier

Staff:

Susan C. Jones, Consumer Specialist III
Consumer Affairs Branch

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Vice Chairperson Gulakowski.

Minutes

Vice Chairperson Gulakowski made the motion to accept the minutes. The minutes for the February 21, 2023, meetings were approved unanimously, 9-0-0.

Report of the Chairperson

Vice Chairperson Gulakowski read an email statement from Chairperson Kratovil who was unable to attend the meeting.

Fellow Commissioners,

I regret that I am not able to join our March meeting and my first as Chair. I find myself unavoidably detained by a work obligation on the West Coast, but look forward to seeing you all next month.

While I will have additional remarks about our future agenda and initiatives at our next meeting, for now I'll share this:

I have reached out to each of you over email and am genuinely thankful for the thoughtful responses I have received from several of you. There are some consistent themes emerging from the feedback, many of which align with my own thinking on how we individually as Commissioners can do more, and how we as a body can provide the best constituent service possible for the residents of the County, in support of our charter and the responsibilities delegated to us under the County Code.

To wrap up, I'll leave everyone with an item for our next meeting: While staff asked us for agenda items at our last meeting, frankly we didn't have much to offer. Some of you have shared exciting ideas that I hope you'll not hesitate to present. I would encourage you to think about

agenda items where some action can be derived as a result of it, rather than just a purely informational agenda item that has no impact or “to-do” after our meeting concludes.

Again, sorry I cannot be with you and look forward to seeing you next month.

Report of the Director

Susan C. Jones, Consumer Specialist II, Consumer Affairs Branch, on behalf of Rebecca L. Makely, Director of Cable and Consumer Services stated the department has just received the Massage Taskforce proposed amendments and staff needs time to review before proceeding with public hearing in April. Staff withdraws request for Public Hearing Authorization.

Commissioner Matters

Commissioner Kirk mentioned seeing more out of state license tags of permanent residents of Fairfax County in his neighborhood and other areas and the need for residents to change license plate for Fairfax County taxes.

Commissioner Belkowitz had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Svab had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Springer had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Hargraves had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Freedenthal had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Kharat had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Commissioner Roark had no matters to bring before the Commission.

Old Business

Susan C. Jones, Consumer Specialist III, Consumer Affairs Branch, briefly discussed the results of National Consumer Protection Week and encouraged the Commission to review the presentations for Consumer Affairs Day on the department website.

New Business

1. Request to Authorize Advertisement of a Public Hearing. The matter was deferred to the April meeting.

Commissioner Hargraves made the motion to adjourn without objection. The meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM.

CPC Calendar

Consumer Protection Commission
2023 Planning Calendar
April 18, 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
 -

- May 16
 -

- June 20
 - Virginia Senior Medicare Patrol Presentation by Commissioner Freedenthal

- July 18
 - FY 2023 Annual Report

- August 15
 -

- September 19
 - 2023 Taxicab Biennial Determination Report

- October 17
 - Electrification/EV Charging Presentation

- November 21
 - Nomination of Officers

- December 19
 -

CPC Membership

Name

Staff

Harold G. Belkowitz
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Rebecca L. Makely, Director
Department of Cable and Consumer Services
703-324-5947
rebecca.makely@fairfaxcounty.gov

VACANT

Chester J. Freedenthal
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Susan Jones, Consumer Specialist III
Consumer Affairs Branch
703-324-5877
susan.jones@fairfaxcounty.gov

Denis Gulakowski
(Vice-Chairperson)
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Main number: 703-222-8435, TTY 711
Fax number: 703-653-1310
consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov

Dirck A. Hargraves
Appt. Expires 7/31/2023

Pratik J. Kharat
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Dennis D. Kirk
Appt. Expires 7/31/2025

Jason J. Kratovil (Chairperson)
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Triston "Chase" O'Savio
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Michael J. Roark
Appt. Expires 7/31/2023

Jacqueline Rosier (Secretary)
Appt. Expires 7/31/2025

Maurice B. Springer
Appt. Expires 07/31/2024

Paul Svab
Appt. Expires 7/31/2024

Community Outreach

Outreach Event Calendar April 2023

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	# of Guests	Event Time	Staff
4/1/2023	Northern Virginia Housing Expo	Dominion High School 21326 Augusta Drive Sterling, VA	200	10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	MP LY
4/11/2023	Spring Off-Campus Housing Fair	George Mason University 450 Rivanna River Way Fairfax, VA		11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	MP LY
4/11/2023	Scam Presentation	ExxonMobile Potomic Annuitants Club 12130 Sunset Hills Road Reston, VA		12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	PB
4/17/2023	Consumer Knowledge	West Potomac High School 6500 Quander Road Alexandria, VA		8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	MP CH
4/18/2023	Consumer Knowledge	West Potomac High School 6500 Quander Road Alexandria, VA		8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	MP LY
4/20/2023	Consumer Connection Senior Medicare Patrol	Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Facebook		11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.	SCJ
4/25/2023	Consumer Knowledge	Lake Braddock Secondary School 9500 Burke Lake Road Burke, VA		1:45 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.	MP

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 Affairs Day: National Consumer Protection Week (March 9, 2023)

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/consumer-affairs-day-2023>

Consumer Connection: Senior Medicare Patrol (April 17, 2023)

Information Items

Virginia towing companies could gain the right to impose \$20 fuel surcharge ([more](#))

County Police Keep Up Pressure on “Hidden Crime” of Human Trafficking ([more](#))

Capital Bikeshare Launches Next Generation Electric Bicycle ([more](#))

Virginia towing companies could gain the right to impose \$20 fuel surcharge

Legislation would sunset on July 1, 2024, pending governor's signature

BY: [NATHANIEL CLINE](#) - MARCH 9, 2023 12:01 AM



(Spencer Platt / Getty Images)

Lawmakers passed [legislation](#) granting towing operators in Virginia the ability to charge \$20 to cover fuel for every private property or privacy trespass tow. A vehicle tow can cost up to \$150 in Virginia, with exceptions

“We feel we are putting the cart before the horse if we don’t look at consumer protections, data transparency and a fuel increase altogether,” Creinin said.

Lawmakers including Dels. Charniele Herring, D-Alexandria, and Lamont Bagby, D-Henrico, also opposed the legislation on Feb. 2.

Herring expressed displeasure after a speaker gave testimony that indicated consumer protection was as important as increasing towing fees.

“To say you are going to talk about consumer protection only if you are going to talk about fees ... puts you in a bad position and makes the industry look like a bunch of predators,” Herring said.

Consumer protection is “very important” because when someone’s vehicle is towed, Herring said, it takes drivers away from getting children to school, work or the hospital.

Bagby said some constituents have also expressed that their vehicles have remained impounded because of financial restraints. Vehicle owners who fail to pick up their vehicles early often incur increased costs.

“One single mistake should not put you in a position to lose your vehicle,” said Bagby on Feb. 2.

Municipalities are authorized to set “reasonable limits” on towing fees, according to state code.

Michael Croker, of Shanks Towing South, was one of several bill supporters during this year’s session who said the issue driving the fuel surcharge push was increasing fuel costs.

depending on locality and whether the towing happens on a weekend or holiday.

The legislation, which initially carried a \$30 fuel surcharge, was amended by lawmakers before the bill's passage.

The House passed the bill on a 50-45 vote, with a 21-19 vote in the Senate. Del. Scott Wyatt, R-Hanover, who carried the legislation, said consumer protection is key but was surprised by lawmakers' mixed reactions to the bill, which is a response to the towing industry's push to address inflation.

"I would never have thought this bill to assist small family-owned businesses would create so much debate in committees and both bodies," said Wyatt during a Feb. 23 floor vote. "These small businesses are just trying to pay their employees a little more during tough economic times."

However, Democratic lawmakers including Sen. Barbara Favola, D-Arlington, described the amendment lowering the surcharge from \$30 to \$20 as a way to make "a bad bill slightly better." Favola urged lawmakers to vote against the legislation while they wait for the Secretary of Transportation to analyze towing data from Virginia's localities and develop a consumer protection provision that would give individuals the right to sue a towing company, instead of relying on the attorney general to do it for them.

"This sort of Frankenstein's monster of a bill is not really how we should be doing this," said Del. Alfonso Lopez, D-Arlington, who opposed the legislation.

The Virginia Association of Counties opposed the legislation, as did Arlington County. Ilana Creinin, Arlington's legislative affairs liaison, said the locality opposed the bill due to the lack of data transparency and consumer protections.

“The largest expense is payroll and second largest is fuel, which has more than doubled in the last three years,” Croker said at the Feb. 2 House Transportation Committee meeting.

Legislators including Dels. Terry Austin, R-Botetourt, and Delores McQuinn, D-Richmond, who reflected on inflation’s impact on gasoline costs, sided with the tow operators.

“All of us are dealing with situations that we hope would give us some relief,” McQuinn said.

Austin added that he understands lawmakers regulate the income of towing companies by setting the rates, but he doesn’t believe that operators “should be held accountable for other people’s negligence.” He later added, “I don’t know how we balance this scale.”

The bill, which sunsets on July 1, 2024, awaits the governor’s signature.

County police keep up pressure on 'hidden crime' of human trafficking

Victims come in several types, officials say in Board of Supervisors briefing
Brian Trompeter Mar 31, 2023, 10:00 AM



Fairfax County police Maj. Thea Pirnot briefs the Board of Supervisors' Safety and Security Committee March 28 about law enforcement's efforts to combat human trafficking.

Even in Fairfax County, which local officials routinely trumpet as the safest jurisdiction of its size in the nation, police must wield a wide array of resources to combat human trafficking.

County police investigated 25 human-trafficking cases each year in 2021 and 2022 and pursued criminal charges seven times in both of those years, Fairfax County Police Chief Kevin Davis said at the March 28 meeting of the Board of Supervisors' Safety and Security Committee.

Persuading victims to testify in such cases can be difficult. Human traffickers depend more on technology than brute force, Davis said.

“Contrary to what is portrayed in Hollywood, human traffickers often utilize very subtle and strategic methods to identify and groom victims,” he said. “Human trafficking is often a hidden crime, and our priority is to identify the victims so they can be rescued. From there, we work diligently to bring the perpetrators to justice.”

Human trafficking – defined as using force, fraud or coercion to compel someone to work, provide services or engage in a commercial sex act – is often unreported, under-reported or unidentified, said Maj. Thea Pirnot, commander of the police department’s Organized Crime and Intelligence Bureau.

County police divide the crime into two categories, sex and labor trafficking:

- Labor-trafficking victims in the United States tend to do agricultural, housekeeping, childcare or factory work, Pirnot said. Common risk factors for them include poverty, immigration status, low educational levels and unpaid debt, she said. Victims of labor trafficking often are brought into jobs under false pretenses and kept there via threats and violence.
- Sex-trafficking victims often have a history of poverty, substance abuse, homelessness, mental illness, involvement in the commercial-sex industry or being exploited or abused, Pirnot said.

These victims differ from prostitutes, who take up their work freely, may leave at any time, decide on the circumstances for engaging in sex, control their own money and do not depend on another person to further their activities, Pirnot said. But prostitutes sometimes become trapped in sex-trafficking schemes and are reluctant to admit their situation to police, she said.

Child victims of sex trafficking frequently have run away from home or been homeless; suffered chronic abuse and neglect, emotional distress, family dysfunction or a lack of social support; identified as LGBTQ; had learning disabilities, developmental or cognitive delays and mental illness; engaged in substance abuse; or lived in poverty, she said.

Human traffickers sometimes kidnap, physically or sexually assault, or drug their victims. Traffickers also may use fraud, such as tricking victims into believing the traffickers love them, telling victims they are going to be models or providing basic needs without explaining why. Human traffickers also may resort to blackmail, debt bondage or threats against the victims or their families, Pirnot said.

Traffickers often use a combination of the above methods to secure their victims, she said. They frequently meet victims through social media and online gaming, making it especially important for parent to stress online safety with their children, she added.

“The person on the other side of that screen name or that avatar can be anyone they want to be to gain the trust of a potential victim,” Pirnot said.

Sexting – sending sexual images via texting – can lead to victims’ being blackmailed, she said.

County police take a “trauma-informed and collaborative approach” to investigating human trafficking and have a specially trained detective who looks into each suspected sex-trafficking case, Pirnot said. The team also has multiple other members with specialized experience.

Fairfax County police receive information on human trafficking during basic training, and the department provides in-service training on the subject several times each year at the academy.

The police department collaborates with a host of other public and private organizations – ranging from Fairfax County Public Schools and the county’s Fire and Rescue Department to Shelter House, Virginia State Police, and the FBI – to care for human-trafficking victims and hold perpetrators responsible.

After Pirnot outlined several cases in which young people had been sexually exploited, Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Franconia), who chairs the Safety and Security Committee, said it was “kind of painful to imagine that this is happening, unfortunately, in our community and that we’ve got to do something to prevent and stop it.”

Capital Bikeshare Launches Next Generation Electric Bicycle

For Immediate Release

March 20, 2023

[Fairfax County's Capital Bikeshare program](#) has launched its next generation electric bicycle. **Fairfax County, Arlington County, and Washington, D.C. are the first jurisdictions in the country to acquire this next generation model from Lyft**, which manufactures and operates bikeshare equipment. Approximately 850 e-bikes will roll out in those jurisdictions through April 2023, of which Fairfax County owns 45. **The new model will go into circulation around Merrifield, Reston, and Tysons. The rollout begins March 20.**



Keep an eye out for the new e-bikes at the following Fairfax County Capital Bikeshare stations:

- **Tysons Metro North**
- **Dunn Loring Metro**
- **W&OD Trail/Sunset Hills Road & Isaac Newton Square**
- **Wiehle-Reston Metro South**
- **Reston Town Center Metro North**

New E-Bike Features:

- **No shift transmission, just pedal and go!**
- **Electric assist up to 20 mph**
- **Stronger basket**
- **Retroreflective paint improves visibility**
- **Larger battery for longer rides and County hills**
- **More durable seat clamp**

Annual members pay \$0.10 per minute and \$2 to park the bike outside of a station. Nonmembers pay \$1 to unlock the bike and \$0.15 per minute. [Capital Bikeshare for All](#) members can ride the electric bikes for free up to 1 hour and the \$2 out of station fee is waived.

In Spring 2023, Fairfax County plans to order 100 e-bikes to support [planned expansion around Franconia-Springfield and Tysons](#). In 2024 and beyond, Fairfax County plans to acquire approximately 200 additional e-bikes to support expansion around the Huntington and Innovation Metrorail Stations, Baileys Crossroads, Seven Corners, and Annandale.