

## **10/10/23 CCFAC Public Hearing Written Testimonies Submitted**

1. Michael Mahrer, Senior Director of Advancement, The English Empowerment Center - formerly the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)
2. Roshon Casey-Lee, Britepaths client, County resident (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)
3. Jerry Poje, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)
4. Marianela Funes, Community Organizer, Tenants and Workers United (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)
5. Mary Paden, Housing Committee Chair, Fairfax County NAACP (SPEAKER - VIRTUAL)
6. Bradley Staton, NVRC Board of Directors, Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (SPEAKER – VIRTUAL)
7. Joint written comments from Cornerstones, FACETS, Lorton Community Action Center, and Western Fairfax Christian Ministries, submitted by Harmonie Taddeo of WFCM (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)
8. Eileen McCartin, Executive Director, Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons
9. Sue Mairena, President, Annandale Christian Community for Action
10. Sandra Benavente, Advocacy Manager, Ayuda

**1) Michael Mahrer, Senior Director of Advancement, The English Empowerment Center, formerly Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)**

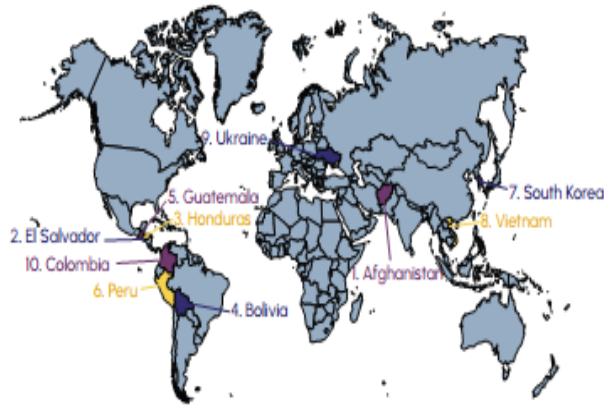
## English Empowerment Center Learners

Every year, the English Empowerment Center welcomes over **1,500 learners** from **90** different countries who speak more than **50** different languages.



### LEARNER DEMOGRAPHICS

#### 2023 Top 10 Countries of Origin



#### 2023 Top 10 Languages of Origin

- |            |               |            |                  |               |
|------------|---------------|------------|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Spanish | 2. Dari       | 3. Pashtu  | 4. Farsi/Persian | 5. Arabic     |
| 6. Korean  | 7. Vietnamese | 8. Russian | 9. Amharic       | 10. Ukrainian |

### LEARNER FACTS



- 73% are female and 85% of all learners are between ages 25-59



- 1,932 dependent children have parents in English Empowerment Center programs



9 yrs or less education

- 64% of English Empowerment Center population lives below the poverty level (\$30,000 for a family of four)

- 57% are working one or more jobs

- 39% of learners had nine years or less of education before coming to the English Empowerment Center

### LEARNER ACHIEVEMENTS

After a semester, English Empowerment Center learners achieved many significant goals. In 2023, over **81%** of our learners achieved two or more goals, such as:

914 improved employability skills  
411 entered/retained employment



1,382 learners achieved personal goals such as voting for the first time, and strengthening family relations

605 increased involvement in their communities; some learners registered to vote or voted for the first time



1,004 students improved technology skills

82% of learners in our Family Learning Program (FLP) increased their involvement in their children's education or literacy activities



[www.EnglishEmpowermentCenter.org](http://www.EnglishEmpowermentCenter.org)  
[info@EnglishEmpowermentCenter.org](mailto:info@EnglishEmpowermentCenter.org)  
703-237-0866



## **2) Roshon Casey-Lee, Britepaths client, County resident (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)**

My name is Roshon Casey-Lee, I am a native of Richmond, Va and a resident of Fairfax Co for three years. My family and I moved to Fairfax in June 2020 after I landed my dream job based in D.C. Despite this great career move, for the past three years we have struggled financially to gain our footing in our new community. This has been mainly based on the underemployment of my husband, exorbitant rent rates and high interest debt we amassed to help us stay afloat. Due to these challenges, we fell behind on our rent. Our apartment complex connected us to the Fairfax Co. Coordinated Services which led to us being connected with Britepaths. It is because of Britepaths that we are still here in Fairfax Co. as residents today. Britepaths has impacted me and my family in a variety of ways. I have been able to participate in a life-changing financial mentorship program that has helped shift my mindset regarding money and debt. My mentor and I have worked on reducing my debt, improving my credit score and starting a savings account in which after 12 months of consistent saving Britepaths will match up to \$500 of the amount saved. We have also been able to get assistance through their food program. The grocery store gift cards and vouchers to the farmer's market have been invaluable to us. The food program allowed us to receive help and keep a sense of dignity at the same time. Struggling financially is stressful and at times this has caused me to experience high anxiety and depression. My mentor suggested I get in touch with the Women's Center. I did and was able to talk with a counselor there to help me deal with the emotional impact of my situation. When our car, which also serves as my husband's main mode of employment as a rideshare driver, broke down, Britepaths was able to provide financial assistance to repair it. My husband is currently participating in the amazing Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cohort offered by Britepaths Workforce Development department. This cohort is set to change the trajectory of his career and our lives financially. We are still fighting the battle to be on steady footing financially, However, knowing that an agency like Britepaths is there for us makes us more confident and more hopeful that we will make it through this season of financial strain.

**3) Jerry Poje, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)**

**Testimony  
Before CCFAC  
on the County's 2024 Action Plan for Housing<sup>1</sup>  
Tuesday, October 19, 2023**

I'm Jerry Poje, grateful for this opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

Longtime tenure on our County's Human Services Council and Affordable Housing Advisory Council informs my testimony on behalf of my congregation.

Ensuring affordable homes for all became our imperative - ever since nurturing an interfaith hypothermia shelter - now in our twentieth year. We've served hundreds of neighbors and alerted many more to this unsolved challenge by hosting DEI community dialogues, an underutilized citizen participation opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

Please amend this year's Plan and build a better 2025 Plan with stronger analysis and action.

More explicitly embed the County's Strategic Plan and Phased implementation into action plans that set specific pre-pandemic need for 46,000 new affordable homes while preserving all exiting ones.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/housing/sites/housing/files/assets/documents/consolidated%20plan/fy2024one-year-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See: [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/housing/sites/housing/files/assets/documents/ccfac/sep-tember%2012,%202023/october%2010%202023%20ccfac%20public%20hearing%20notice\\_draft.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/housing/sites/housing/files/assets/documents/ccfac/sep-tember%2012,%202023/october%2010%202023%20ccfac%20public%20hearing%20notice_draft.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See our UUCF Congregational Resolution committing us to end and prevent homelessness thru providing affordable homes: <https://uucf.org/social-justice/congregational-resolutions/resolution/>

<sup>4</sup> See the overall plan (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/housing/sites/housing/files/assets/documents/communitywide%20housing%20strategic%20plan/communitywide%20housing%20strategic%20plan%20final%20-072518.pdf>); and short-term policy and funding recommendations embedded in two phases (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/housing/communitywideplan>)

While the Board of Supervisors adopted a goal of 10,000 new affordable homes by 2034,<sup>5</sup> much more aggressive goals are needed.

The COVID pandemic has had profound, adverse consequences for all, but especially for those marginally sustained.<sup>6</sup>

So-called “unwinding” of federal relief funding has eroded the social safety net for food security,<sup>7</sup> alleviating childhood poverty,<sup>8</sup> and providing healthcare benefits.<sup>9</sup>

Dispel the perception that January’s Point-In-Time survey is an adequate descriptor of the crisis. During the County’s 2021 Affordable Housing Symposium, NVCC President Kress stated that the 15% of her 90,000+ college students were homeless.<sup>10</sup>

Fulfill the promise of the 2016 Human Services Bond where \$48 million was provided to renovate/expand the County’s Community Shelters. Seven years later, the Embury Rucker Shelter remains aging with building subsystems far beyond their intended 30 year life-cycle,<sup>11</sup> and meanwhile a tent encampment grows nearby.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Fairfax Now: <https://www.ffxnow.com/2022/03/23/county-doubles-affordable-housing-goal-for-2034/>

<sup>6</sup> Both domestically (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/united-states-pandemic-impact-people-poverty>) and globally (<https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/covid-19-leaves-legacy-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality>)

<sup>7</sup> As of March 2023: <https://www.wric.com/news/virginia-news/covid-era-snap-benefits-ending-for-all-virginians-effective-immediately/>

<sup>8</sup> Child poverty rate surged to 12.4% in 2022, up from 5.2% in the year prior, after cessation of the expanded child tax credits and the end of stimulus checks. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/09/12/child-poverty-surged-after-stimulus-checks-tax-credits-ended.html>

<sup>9</sup> See, “10 Things to Know About the Unwinding of the Medicaid Continuous Enrollment Provision” <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-the-unwinding-of-the-medicaid-continuous-enrollment-provision/>

<sup>10</sup> President Ann Kress, opening remarks: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2paA49OxG\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2paA49OxG_E)

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2017/advertised/cip.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See “Neighbors Meet Neighbors At Homeless Encampment On A Hill In Reston” <https://patch.com/virginia/reston/neighbors-meet-neighbors-homeless-encampment-hill-reston>



aging with building subsystems far beyond their intended 30 year life-cycle,<sup>11</sup> and meanwhile a tent encampment grows nearby.<sup>12</sup>

Extreme weather is an ever present and growing reality<sup>13</sup> in our county with neighbors lacking shelter suffering most extreme health risks. Thankfully, this summer the county established an extreme heat response plan.<sup>14</sup> However, independent assessment by the NAACP indicated many opportunities for improvement.<sup>15</sup>

Implement a pilot program employing sturdy short-term shelters as used elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Prevent evictions by ensuring rights to counsel, and maximizing rental assistance to those in need.

America faces a historic eviction crisis. Amid a nationwide housing shortage, rents are surging to unprecedented levels, and many renters cannot keep pace.<sup>17</sup>

State eviction protections ended June 2022. Federal rental relief ended this year.

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<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2017/advertised/cip.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See "Neighbors Meet Neighbors At Homeless Encampment On A Hill In Reston"

<https://patch.com/virginia/reston/neighbors-meet-neighbors-homeless-encampment-hill-reston>

<sup>13</sup> See the analysis for September 2023:

<sup>14</sup> See 7/29/2023 Memo from Deputy County Executive Chris Leonard to the Board of Supervisors <https://www.ffxnow.com/files/2022/08/Resources-for-Persons-Experiencing-Homelessness-and-Other-Vulnerable-Populations-During-Heat-Emergencies.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See: "As Fairfax County heats up, advocates seek more options to cool off unhoused residents" <https://www.ffxnow.com/2022/08/11/new-as-fairfax-county-heats-up-advocates-seek-more-options-to-cool-off-unhoused-residents/>

<sup>16</sup> See the Pallet shelter approach used in over 100 communities: <https://palletshelter.com/>

<sup>17</sup> See the recent report from the ACLU, "No Eviction Without Representation" (2022) <https://www.aclu.org/report/no-eviction-without-representation?redirect=evictionbrief>

More than 3.6M evictions are filed each year.<sup>18</sup> Tenants facing eviction risk losing their home and personal property. Evictions increase the risk of homelessness and further housing instability.

Evictions can disrupt employment and education, and lead to adverse mental and physical health effects. During Covid evictions led to increased infections and death. Only 3% of tenants are represented by counsel. Represented tenants are more likely to remain housed, more likely to pay less in costs, and more likely to get more time to move.

More aggressive monitoring is needed for both the number of evictions and the number of unlawful detainers issues each month. The unlawful detainer is the first step in an eviction telling the tenant to go to court. This number rose sharply in January, February and March to the highest levels in years. Many tenants 'self evict' when they get this notice because they don't know how to fight an eviction and they don't want an eviction on their records. Their exit deeply disrupts family life and our local economy.

Finally, through CCFAC's collective leadership and deep community connections, urge the county to conduct a more thorough Housing and Human Services Needs Assessment, and then prepare a new Human Services Resource Plan for 2024. Ensure that the ~40 percent of service deliveries performed by non-profit organizations, faith communities and other are fully assessed and strengthened through that effort.

Greater organizing can bolster the political will for ending homelessness, moving Fairfax in a better direction to our collective benefit.

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<sup>18</sup> See report from the Eviction Lab: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/05/GROMIS\\_Ashley\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/05/GROMIS_Ashley_Paper.pdf)

#### 4) Marianela Funes, Community Organizer, Tenants and Workers United (SPEAKER IN-PERSON)



Tuesday, October 10, 2023

To the members of the Fairfax County Consolidated Community Funding Advisory Committee,  
Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns tonight. My name is Marianela, and I work with Tenants and Workers United. I am speaking tonight on behalf of our organization and the needs of our community. For over 36 years, TWU has worked with low-income communities of color across Northern Virginia, including in south Fairfax County along the Route 1 Corridor, with a focus on securing deeply affordable housing for low-income renters and mobile home communities.

We are working with low income families and people of color who are suffering a dire economic crisis. Most of our families do not make more than 60% of the area median income, and they need to work two or three jobs to secure a home, provide food for their families, and afford other basic essentials. The lack of stable, affordable, and dignified housing is a crisis, and we need action from the County that supports everyone who lives here, especially those who are struggling the most.

Fairfax County needs to start creating units for families that earn less than 60% of the area median income. "Workforce" housing does not include those at the lowest income levels. Fairfax county programs like ARISE should be designed to help everyone in the county, with a focus on those who earn less than 60% AMI.

The One Fairfax Policy promises that you will "look intentionally, comprehensively and systematically at barriers that may be creating gaps in opportunity." One way to address these systemic opportunities is to allocate adequate funding to the preservation, creation, and improvement of affordable housing, including mobile home communities and low-income apartments. We encourage you to get create and explore all possibilities, including but not limited to:

- Supporting and funding land purchases, co-ops, and land trusts to help residents secure home ownership and housing stability in the communities they love
- Establishing a County-based, County-funded emergency rent relief program
- Create assistance programs that promote housing stabilization for the lowest income communities.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts and plans on these action items. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marianela Funes  
Community Organizer  
Tenants and Workers United (TWU)



5) Mary Paden, Housing Committee Chair, Fairfax County NAACP (SPEAKER - VIRTUAL)



October 10, 2023

**Fairfax NAACP statement on priority issues for Consolidated Community Funding Advisory Committee public hearing October 10,2023**

Based on our work over the past couple of years in conjunction with several partner organizations, Fairfax NAACP suggests six areas where the County could place a greater priority for funding.

While we appreciate the emphasis on giving priority to building permanent housing as the ultimate solution for residents who are homeless or inadequately housing, we see too many people suffering during the four to six years it takes to plan and build new facilities. We believe funds should also be directed to immediate solutions while keeping the goal of long-term solutions.

Two areas where relief should be provided are:

- Temporary housing for unsheltered homeless people, especially those who are older or in poor health, and
- Rent relief for residents in danger of eviction to keep them from becoming homeless.

Throughout the pandemic, both areas were generously funded. As pandemic funds dry up, we can see that continuing relief is needed in the poorest areas of the county which are still not fully recovered. We understand it must be at a lower level.

We also see a need, based on conversations with low-income residents, for these priorities:

- Strengthen county oversight of companies contracted to manage Fairfax County Rehabilitation and Housing Authority (FCRHA) properties.
- Conduct Fair housing testing to understand whether landlords throughout the county are accepting vouchers as a source of income as mandated by state law.
- Target CDBG and county funds to increase pedestrian safety in walking to bus stops and school bus stops in disadvantaged neighborhoods. We have had complaints from residents about the lack of crosswalks and pedestrian lighting. These neighborhoods should get priority because they have been neglected.
- Develop a transparent means of assessing need in the county to help identify priority areas. Priority areas should be reflected in annual budget requests. The current methods used are not transparent to advocacy and neighborhood groups who can offer valuable feedback about conditions on the ground.

**Provide temporary shelter for homeless people unable to access county shelters.**

Residents who are unhoused need short-term housing while new permanent housing is being built. It takes 4-6 years to finance and build any affordable housing project. Meanwhile there is a wait list (currently two months) at our three emergency shelters for individuals and many families are being housed in motels for lack of temporary housing.

An NAACP survey of 63 unsheltered people at drop-in centers in July 2023 found that:

28 people experienced symptoms caused by heat that were serious enough to require medical or center staff attention.

12 reported below average or poor health in general.

21 (31%) were over age 65.

12 wanted indoor temporary housing.

15 wanted permanent housing.

The county should explore innovative ways to provide temperature-controlled shelter, especially during summer heat, preferably year-round to people who cannot be accommodated by county shelters or permanent supportive housing.

Two such solutions being explored by nonprofit organizations are:

- Pallet Shelters: small modular shelters that can be installed as secure villages and collapsed and moved as needed.
- Opening space in faith communities for overnight use as is done in hypothermia season.

**Give more temporary rent/utility assistance for residents on verge of eviction.**

The need for rent and utility relief remains high post covid. Evictions are back to pre-covid levels and calls to the county hotline for rent relief fell only 10% in June 2023 compared with June 2022. Because Covid funds are drying up, there is a need to put more county or federal funds into rent relief and legal assistance to keep people in their homes as long as possible.

Both market-rate and committed-affordable rents are rising. 5,000 people/households are on the county wait list for affordable housing vouchers.

**Provide better oversight of FCRHA property management.**

Strengthen oversight by the FCRHA of companies contracted to manage FCRHA properties. These companies must be held to their contractual obligations to perform maintenance and to maintain good relations with tenants including forming resident associations. Post annual public reviews of management company performance.

**Conduct paired testing on landlord acceptance of vouchers as rent payment.**

Conduct testing on landlord acceptance of vouchers as payment as required by state law. Education has been conducted for landlords over the past few years. Now it is time to see if landlords in high-priced areas of opportunity are accepting vouchers. This is a major step in ensuring fair housing.

**Improve pedestrian safety in low-income neighborhoods.**

Safe pedestrian access to bus stops and school bus stops in low-income neglected neighborhoods should be a priority for CGBD funds for neighborhood improvements and county funds for safe streets and active transportation. Give priority to these projects as stated in the Active Fairfax goals. Work with community groups to identify unsafe places that need crosswalks, lighting, sidewalks, and signage. This issue is always brought up in community conversations.

**Create a new needs assessment process.**

Work with community groups to develop a needs assessment tool that includes input from nonprofits, faith-based, and advocacy groups that work directly with the community to distribute food, rent assistance, etc. These groups consistently report there is unfilled need. The county and community need to understand the scope of the need and use it to estimate program costs and track progress.

Sincerely,

*Mary Paden*

Mary Paden, Housing Committee Chair

**6) Bradley Staton, NVRC Board of Directors, Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (SPEAKER – VIRTUAL)**

**I am the Chair of NVRC Board, and I am profoundly hearing impaired since birth. I wear bilateral hearing aids and use speech, lipreading and sign language to communicate.**

Since 1988 the **Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons** (NVRC) has served a diverse community, including, deaf-blind, late-deafened, parents with deaf and hard of hearing children, children of deaf and hard of hearing parents, educators, sign language teachers and students, hearing aid users, people with cochlear implants, people with tinnitus, and people with auditory processing disorders.

I am providing public comment to request attention be paid to access to housing and human services for persons in Fairfax who are deaf or hard of hearing. Specifically, we ask that attention be paid to better acoustics in housing design in common areas, and that planning include some set asides for deaf and hard of hearing housing applicants.

We are also asking for additional funding to help meet the needs of a growing population aging into hearing loss. The number of people in Fairfax who are aging is growing. NVRC would like to provide additional outreach services, hearing screenings with consult, information on assistive technology, coping with hearing loss and information on hearing aids. There is research that shows untreated hearing loss is correlated with higher rates of dementia and getting fitted with a proper hearing device is correlated with improved quality of life and less incidence of dementia.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,  
Brad

Bradley W. Staton  
NVRC Board of Directors  
NVRC Board Chair

**7) Joint written comments from Cornerstones, FACETS, Lorton Community Action Center, and Western Fairfax Christian Ministries, submitted by Harmonie Taddeo, WFCM (SPEAKER - IN-PERSON)**

October 10, 2023

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Consolidated Community Funding Advisory Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the housing and community development needs to be addressed in the One-Year Action Plan for FY2025, and other critical housing and human services needs and trends that should be considered by CCFAC in its review of the One Year Action Plan, and by the Board of Supervisors and County Executive as they consider critical investments for FY2025.

The county has outlined those with the greatest needs in the Executive Summary of the One Year Action Plan for FY 2023 and FY 2024 as:

- o Individuals and families who are homeless
- o Persons with low-and extremely low incomes
- o Persons with disabilities, and
- o Low-income seniors

In addition, the plan lays out several actions planned to reduce the number of poverty-level families from the estimated 67,258 persons living below the poverty level in 2018 (pg. 52). One of which is:

- o Support increases in program and services providing the greatest support to low-income families and individuals as well as actions minimizing reductions to such programs

On behalf of Cornerstones, FACETS, Lorton Community Action Center, and Western Fairfax Christian Ministries – we offer the following observations and recommendations for your consideration and look forward to speaking with you this evening. Our organizations serve as backbone organizations in different regions of Fairfax County, and while there are some differences, we collectively are observing similar needs and trends across our county.

Key themes that are impacting our neighbors, and our work as partners are as follows:

- Reduction/end of pandemic benefits
  - o Impact of the end of SNAP emergency allotments and other federal benefits and programs has caused an increase in the number of food insecure families and families using our food pantries that exceeds 30% year over year
- Increase in the cost of basic needs and rent due to inflation and other economic factors
- Increase in employment, however work-hours and therefore total pay are often lower than pre-pandemic

Therefore, we make the following recommendation as it pertains to FY 2025-2026 Consolidated Community Funding Pool:



1. The Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) designated for emergency food and emergency housing has been allocated \$5M in FY 2025 and FY 2026 to be divided as follows: \$4M for housing and \$1M for food. In the One-Year Action Plan for the County FY 2023 it was noted that the funds to be awarded would range from \$5M-\$6M for this category. With the steep reduction in funding for emergency housing and food due to the end of ARPA Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) and Food Access Program (FAP) grants, **we recommend allocating \$6M for emergency housing and food with no less than \$1.5M for food.** In FY 2024 there is over \$2.5M for food and food operations between the CCFP and FAP grants and the reduction to \$1M will be detrimental for community members as the numbers of families we are serving is rising in FY 2024 due to the end of SNAP emergency allotment benefits and other programs.

Below please find background information regarding our organizations:

### **Region 1 – Lorton Community Action Center**

The Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC), which serves residents south of United Community in zip codes 22060, 22199, 22079, and 22122, provides food, basic needs, and self-sufficiency programs through the generous support of the community. LCAC has served the community since 1975. The organization has seen an increase of 37% among clients needing food from July-September 2023 compared to the same time frame last year.

### **Region 2 – FACETS**

In 1988, FACETS was established by volunteers from local faith communities to provide meals to individuals and families experiencing homelessness and food insecurity in Fairfax County, Virginia. From these beginnings, FACETS has evolved into one of Fairfax County's largest social and human services non-profits serving residents in Regions 1, 2, and 4. Today, FACETS meets emergency shelter, food and medical needs; helps people gain safe, sustainable and permanent housing; and works with people to end the cycle of homelessness and poverty through educational support, financial and career counseling, and solving community problems that create systemic barriers to success. By helping Fairfax residents in distress overcome emergency situations and by providing acute basic needs support to our at-risk neighbors, individuals and families are better prepared to prevent and remedy crises and improve long-term outcomes for themselves, their children and the generations to follow.

### **Region 3 – Cornerstones**

Cornerstones was founded in 1970 to provide support and advocacy to people in need of emergency shelter, food, affordable housing, quality childcare and other human services. The majority of the households we serve are people of color, including a high number of immigrants, including those who may be undocumented or unauthorized migrants. Cornerstones programs provide:

- **Stability:** Basic needs such as emergency shelter, nutritious food and other financial assistance.
- **Empowerment:** Affordable rental housing, quality affordable childcare, job training and life skills supports, and out-of-school time programs. Operating a nonprofit center that provides office and training space for nonprofit, community and government partners in a "one-stop" neighborhood center known as Connections for Hope Partnership (C4HP).
- **Hope:** Working collectively to address racial and social inequities manifested in our neighborhoods and the disproportionate number of people of color who live in poverty or who need our programs. Opportunity Neighborhoods and community centers facilitate community-informed solutions to these issues and inform our advocacy efforts on behalf of clients.

#### **Region 4 – Western Fairfax Christian Ministries**

As the anchor human services organization in Region 4, Western Fairfax Christian Ministries has been serving community members in western Fairfax for 36 years. Based in Chantilly, we have two client choice food pantries in Chantilly 20151 and Centreville 20121 which each have vulnerability indexes of 3.88. In addition, we have fourteen Free Food Fridge locations throughout Region 4 to provide supplemental food through partner non-profit organizations and Fairfax County Public Schools. WFCM's vision is of a community that is housed and fed. We provide a variety of services and programs to families in 9 zip codes, and we were able to serve over 4,700 unduplicated individuals in FY 2023. In addition, we offer a Pathways to Success program to help families rise out of poverty.

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We, collectively, look forward to discussing these topics with you during tonight's hearing and continuing the dialogue towards long-term success for individuals and families in our community who are facing mental health, food, and housing challenges. We encourage CCFAC and Fairfax County to consider and prioritize sustainable and equitable solutions working with partners on the ground.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerrie Wilson, CEO, Cornerstones

Joe Fay, Executive Director, FACETS

Rob Rutland-Brown, Executive Director, Lorton Community Action Center

Harmonie Taddeo, Executive Director, Western Fairfax Christian Ministries

## 8) Eileen McCartin, Executive Director, Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

**Written Testimony Provided to Fairfax County Consolidated Community Funding Advisory Committee, Oct 10, 2023**

**by Eileen McCartin, Ph. D., Executive Director**

**Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (NVRC) and a bilateral cochlear implant user, whose hearing loss began in childhood.**

Significant hearing loss can be devastating and isolating to the quality of life of individuals and their families. Everyone knows someone who has hearing loss, and it is often frustrating for all parties to communicate. Aging into hearing loss can result in limited contact and interactions with others and avoidance of environments that are acoustically challenging.

Since 1988 the **Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons** (NVRC) has served a diverse community, including, deaf-blind, late-deafened, parents with deaf and hard of hearing children, children of deaf and hard of hearing parents, educators, sign language teachers and students, hearing aid users, people with cochlear implants, people with tinnitus, and people with auditory processing disorders.

Most of the staff and board of NVRC are deaf or hard of hearing, and as such, we have personal experience with hearing loss. We advocate for legislation change and communication access for members of the community. We want people to know about the technology, resources, and laws that can be used to improve quality of life and reduce social isolation.

I am providing public comment to request attention be paid to access to housing and human services for persons in Fairfax who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Regarding accessible housing**, attention needs to be paid to more accessible and culturally suitable housing for low-income residents and/or senior citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, deafblind, or deaf/mobile disabled. In communal spaces, attention should be paid to acoustic design given its impact on hard of hearing residents. If acoustics are poor and the rooms are designed with high ceilings and low-maintenance surfaces, it is extremely difficult for a hard of hearing person to join in, participate, and benefit. When a communal space has little to no sound absorption, it is impossible for the hard of hearing person to communicate effectively with other residents. This type of environment discourages participation and socialization, which in turn increases isolation among people who are hard of hearing. Attention needs to be paid towards how ambient sounds from surrounding areas bleed over to other areas as to cause interference. Taking acoustics into consideration from the start in the design process can go a long way towards ensuring inclusivity.

I am attaching *the filing sent to HUD* by the National Association of the Deaf drafted with input from NVRC and other organizations who collaborated on the needs of Deaf, Deaf Blind, Deaf Disabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened people in accessible housing. This document has extensive information on housing access issues.

**Regarding human services**, I would like to ask that the board attend to issues of communication access to county meetings and events and provide easily understood ways for people to request appropriate accommodations such as sign language interpreters, cued language transliterators, and captioning for in-person and remote gatherings.

It would be beneficial for the county to provide additional funding to NVRC for training on assistive technology, coping with hearing loss, hearing screenings with consult, American Sign Language and Communication Apps courses for first responders as well as presentations on communication challenges, hearing aids, and solutions for people aging into hearing loss.

There is research that shows untreated hearing loss is correlated with higher rates of dementia and getting fitted with a proper hearing device is correlated with improved quality of life and less incidence of dementia.

**Demographics show an increase in our aging population.** Fairfax County reports that, currently, 1 in 7 County residents is 65+, and they project that by 2035 that ratio will be 1 in 5 as the population ages. The County is trying to entice its residents to age in place here. Fairfax County's 50+ Community Action Plan offers robust services to ensure this can happen and NVRC can play an important role in providing services to this population.

**Fairfax County Recent Population Statistics**

Age demographic information from Fairfax County website: Overview of Demographic

**Characteristics (total population in 2021: 1,170,033).**

Total 2020 population: 1,167,000

Total 2021 population: 1,170,033 (+3,033)

Age bracket	2020	2021	Difference
50-54	85,562	82,009	-3,553
55-59	78,852	79,431	+ 579
60-64	68,513	68,982	+ 469
65-69	54,210	54,954	+ 744
70-74	36,515	40,921	+4,406
75-79	24,133	27,819	+3,686
80+	32,454	34,422	+1,968

**Total Fairfax County Population age 50+**

2020 380,239

2021 388,448 (+8,209)

Using the local data and incidence of hearing loss, we see that there are 95,875 residents between the ages of 65 and 74. If one in 3 has a hearing loss, that is 33%, or 30,333. There are 62,241 residents over the age of 75. If two out of three have a hearing loss, that's 66%, or 41,079. Adding those together, you have a total of 71,412 residents in Fairfax County who potentially have age-related hearing loss, an increase of 4,126 residents since 2020.

The numbers alone indicate a need for attention to be paid to the needs of people with hearing loss in the county. Planning to provide services for the community will be beneficial not just for those who have hearing loss but their colleagues, friends, family and the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and to assure the committee that NVRC is committed to access and inclusion of the deaf and hard of hearing community in Fairfax County.

Sincerely,

Eileen McCartin, Ph.D.

Executive Director

(attachment)

*Note: this speaker's testimony attachment is found at the end of this document.*





National Association of the Deaf

[www.nad.org](http://www.nad.org)

July 24, 2023

*via electronic filing*

Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20410

**Re: HUD's Section 504 Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM), 88 FR 24938,  
24 CFR Parts 8 and 9 [Docket No. FR-6257-A-01] RIN 2529-AB03**

On April 25th, 2023, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (hereafter “HUD” or “the Department”) published an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) asking that members of the public, particularly those who are members of the disabled community, comment on a variety of issues pertaining to new guidance on Section 504. In what follows, we address comments 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 13 and suggest solutions for the Department to pursue in the rulemaking process for the most equitable and effective outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened folks (hereafter “deaf and hard of hearing” except where specifically noted).

### Definitions

First, the Department seeks clarification and input on the application and definition of the term “disability” as utilized in HUD programs, given their requirements to adhere to certain statutory authorizations in particular populations.<sup>1</sup> To further extend this definition, we recommend the Department consider adding language involving people with intersectional disabilities, such as DeafBlind and DeafDisabled.

### Accessible Technology and Design

Further, the Department seeks input on the types of auxiliary aids and services individuals with disabilities seek in housing and community development programs. In respect to the deaf and hard of hearing community, such aids as installed within a modern residential space may include but are not limited to flashing light-equipped devices that alert for doorbells and alarms such as fire or carbon monoxide detectors as well as vibrating technology and phone

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<sup>1</sup> See 24 CFR 8.3 (24).



notifications for those who cannot see the flashing technology. It remains key that any installed smart technology within the home, such as smart thermostats, remain accessible beyond audible commands and responses. For example, a fire alarm that flashes and/or vibrates.<sup>2</sup>

Current ADA regulations for accessible design already includes guidance as to the existence of visually accessible fire alarms, but includes no language mandating landlords or builders to pre-install them.<sup>3</sup> HUD regulations that include accessible measures of these types would provide utility not only to deaf or hard of hearing residents, but many other residents in a wide variety of situations, by providing alternative alert information when hearing residents are wearing headphones, sleeping, or in a noisy environment. The cost of accommodations is lower at the time of construction than it would be to retrofit later, so including accessible technology from the start will save both money as well as potentially lives.

#### Application Process

The application process for housing itself also requires accessibility considerations. Any online service providing videos for viewing or mobile applications in the process should be required to provide captioning for its audiovisual content. If the housing in question is located in an area with a high population of deaf people, American Sign Language (ASL) should be added to these videos as well. This includes possible training modules or informational videos. Without accessibility in these processes, deaf or hard of hearing renters may be entirely deterred in the application and renewal processes. Deaf and hard of hearing consumers have substantial contributions to make towards the rental economy, but first they must be able to access it.

#### Integrated v. Designated Housing

While housing integrated with deaf and hard of hearing tenants may meet the statutory requirements for access, it does not meet their communication needs. Housing specifically designated for deaf and hard of hearing individuals offers several advantages. Firstly, after-the-fact adaptations are not necessary, thus alleviating time and energy away from builders and landlords. Housing designated for the deaf and hard of hearing remains accessible to the hearing; housing designated for the hearing does not remain accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing.

The current standard of allocating “two (2) percent of the total units (or at least one unit, whichever is greater)”<sup>4</sup> may on paper meet all the needs of disabled people seeking housing, but reality offers a much more complicated picture. Without rigorous and proactive accessibility

<sup>2</sup> See [Resources on visual fire alarms](#), *The National Deaf Center*.

<sup>3</sup> See 4.28.3.

<sup>4</sup> See 24 CFR 8.21.



measures, the requirement of increasing accessible housing availability only when necessary offers an additional disincentive to an otherwise interested deaf or hard of hearing renter - where there is a delay in meeting accessibility standards, renters may choose a different option with designated deaf or hard of hearing housing instead. A far more effective standard which would in itself eliminate the need for enforcement and inspection of the two percent guidance<sup>5</sup> is to require all units to have a base level of accessibility in the first place. Barrier concerns regarding seeking, locating, and securing accessible housing would thus be mitigated.

Further, housing designated specifically for deaf or hard of hearing residents fosters cultural centers where communication needs are fully met, rather than isolating deaf or hard of hearing residents within hearing spaces. While integrated housing solves issues of accessible housing availability and promotes inclusion for most people with disabilities, we urge the Department to consider that such practices may instead create isolation for deaf or hard of hearing tenants. In looking to foster a sense of community and daily communication for those whose primary language is ASL, designated deaf or hard of hearing housing is an essential option for many deaf and hard of hearing tenants.

#### *Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV)*

The challenges that exist in utilizing housing choice vouchers (HCV)<sup>6</sup> and other tenant based rental assistance programs toward fulfilling a household's disability related needs are congruent to those discussed in other sections. Clear communication between renters and landlords, as well as accessibility throughout the entire application process, remain crucial to the success of the program. One such approach that may minimize inconsistencies or difficulties in adapting spaces to meet the needs of renters is the "accessible from the start" approach, as discussed in other sections in this filing. Such an approach would not only achieve the benefits shared above, but also help mitigate any shortage of available accessible housing units for the deaf and hard of hearing.

#### *Streamlining Guidance*

The Department seeks guidance in harmonizing the overlapping standards in the varying accessibility in housing regulations, including Section 504, the ADA, and the Fair Housing Act. While the Department's earlier clarification and reaffirmation of the guidance in the Fair Housing

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<sup>5</sup> See 24 CFR 8.22(b)

<sup>6</sup> See 24 CFR 8.28



Act<sup>7</sup> represent a viable starting point, enforcement must go beyond policy language and present active results. To achieve such a result and minimize confusion, the Department ought to focus on utilizing consistent language and definitions, offering resources for transitioning housing to accessible standards, and issuing guidance to renters and landlords in simplified language and accessible formats on what particular rights and responsibilities are to be honored under the statutes.

### Communal Spaces

In regard to shared communal spaces, such as laundry rooms, kitchens, and shared lounges, a similar standard should apply as those suggested in residential areas. For example, while a deaf or hard of hearing renter may have access to flashing light equipped fire alarms in their living space, such a precaution lacks efficacy if an emergency takes place while using a communal laundry space. Furthermore, a hearing person could be listening to music while doing laundry. Accessible alerting in communal spaces offers a universal benefit. This includes accessible from the start technology, requiring minimal adaptation in the event a deaf or hard of hearing resident moves in. Accessible from the start technologies would not only alleviate alteration responsibilities from renters, it may also incentivise deaf or hard of hearing residents to seek out the space given the immediacy of accessibility.

Further, in communal spaces, attention should be paid to acoustic design given its impact on hard of hearing residents. If acoustics are poor and the rooms are designed with high ceilings and low-maintenance surfaces, it is extremely difficult for a hard of hearing person to join in, participate, and benefit. When a communal space has little to no sound absorption, it is impossible for the hard of hearing person to communicate effectively with other residents. This type of environment discourages participation and socialization, which in turn increases isolation among people who are hard of hearing. Attention needs to be paid towards how ambient sounds from surrounding areas bleed over to other areas as to cause interference. Taking acoustics into consideration from the start in the design process can go a long way towards ensuring inclusivity.

### Reasonable Accommodations

We commend the Department for taking the opportunity to clarify the scope and meaning of “reasonable accommodations” in the forthcoming modified guidance on Section 504. We further recommend the Department utilize this opportunity to address in more concrete terms the difference between a “reasonable accommodation” and a “modification” as utilized in 24 CFR 8.11(a).

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<sup>7</sup> See 85 FR 60288



*Intersectional Barriers*

In regards to barriers faced uniquely by those who are members of multiple-marginalized groups, we commend the Department for their reaffirmation of the discriminatory effects standard.<sup>8</sup> We ask the Department continue to keep intersectional barriers at the forefront of their analysis and consider multi-angle filing as a viable option for those seeking relief for alleged discriminatory acts within housing. Barriers faced by people of color, LGBTQIA2S+ people, and other marginalized groups often become compounded by the difficulties in communication faced by deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Thus, striving to maintain clear and accessible communication and inclusion is one of the most beneficial actions HUD can take toward minimizing risks and barriers posed to those with multiple marginalized identities within the housing process.

*Conclusion*

We extend our gratitude to the Department for their commitment to including the perspectives of our community in its decision making processes and urge the Department to incorporate the recommendations herein.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

Zainab Alkebsi

Policy Counsel

National Association of the Deaf

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**National Association of the Deaf (NAD)**

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<sup>8</sup> See 86 FR 33590





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Jennifer Schuck, Chair

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Washington, D.C. - [www.speechnotextcaptioning.org](http://www.speechnotextcaptioning.org)

## 9) Sue Mairena, President, Annandale Christian Community for Action

Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and Board Members. I am Sue Mairena, President of ACCA (Annandale Christian Community for Action) now in its 56<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with the County providing a wide range of services for our neighbors in need in the Annandale, Lincolnia, Bailey's Crossroads and Culmore areas of Fairfax County. The services ACCA provides are divided into 2 major categories. One is the Child Development Center (CDC) and the other is our Human Service Ministry (HSM). I will be speaking about HSM.

First of all, I would like to thank you for your support of ACCA in the past and look forward to your continued partnership with ACCA in the future.

The HSM programs include family emergency assistance, emergency food and hygiene products, pick-up and delivery of furniture for needy families, and transportation to medical appointments.

Other initiatives that ACCA supports are:

- Rebuilding Together (housing rehabilitation program)
- The Annandale CROP Hunger Walk
- Meals On Wheels
- Scholarships for students with disabilities
- The Homework Club and
- Just Neighbors

We need the County's continued support in this fiscal year's budget and future ones as well. The need for assistance is not going away, and is increasing daily. For instance:

Family Emergency Assistance provided **\$7.5M** in assistance for rent, utility bills, prescriptions and other needs since the Pandemic began in addition to its normal operating budget of \$300K and all with volunteer support. For 2023 FEA accounted for 75% of our operating budget providing \$978K in assistance to 385 households which include 1,163 individuals. The need continues!

ACCA Food Pantry volunteers deliver nutritious food and other essentials for healthy living to needy families and individuals in our community. Many of these neighbors do not have transportation to visit a food pantry. ACCA volunteers receive information from the CSP staff and then make the deliveries. In 2023, the Food Pantry assisted 3,872 individuals and 1,250 families, a level higher than 2019 and 2022! With the decrease in SNAP benefits, we continue to see a greater demand for this vitally important service!

Last year, our furniture teams delivered 598 items to 229 people in 62 needy households. This work was accomplished by 75 volunteers, who worked on 10 teams. The furniture program also saw an increase in 2023 as compared to the previous year.

Through partnerships and sharing of resources with other community partners, we can help our neighbors provide a safe and comfortable home for their families. This work included 2,660 hours of work by 78 volunteers.

ACCA continues to participate in Fairfax County initiatives such as prevention of hypothermia, ending homelessness, and encouraging interfaith dialogue.

I would like to close by saying the need for assistance in our County has always been there. The need now continues despite the ending of the pandemic. Our volunteers will continue helping as many of our

neighbors in need as possible. We ask for the County's continued support in this fiscal year's budget and future ones to make our programs possible.

With your continued support, and our incredible volunteers, ACCA will be able to continue its critical mission.

We appreciate your consideration and all the work you do for our County.

Thank you



## 11. Sandra Benavente, Advocacy Manager, Ayuda

October 10, 2023

### Comments from Ayuda on Immigrant Community Needs for the Fairfax County FY25 One-Year Action Plan

We are appreciative of the opportunity to submit public comments on the continuing and emerging human services needs of Fairfax County residents. Since 2008, Ayuda has offered culturally specific, multilingual legal, social, and language access to low-income Fairfax County immigrant residents. In 2023, we have seen and continue to see a critical rise in the need for low-barrier housing and human services for low-income immigrants, which we urge Fairfax County to address in the County's FY25 One-Year Action Plan.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, in 2019 foreign born residents made up 31.2% (370,577) of the total Fairfax County population. As demonstrated in 2019 census data, 14.4% of Fairfax County's noncitizen residents live below the poverty line, compared with 5.8% of naturalized citizens and 4.2% of the County's native-born population. Additionally, average individual income for noncitizens remains at less than half the level of native-born individuals in the County. According to the Fairfax Our Immigrant Neighbors report (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demographics/our-immigrant-neighbors>), the median income for workers ages 20-64 years old for immigrant county residents is \$35,355. For naturalized county residents the median income is \$58,992 and for native born county residents the median income is \$78,791, demonstrating a significant disparity in the county for immigrant workers annual income. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in 2019, 37% of Fairfax County residents speak English "not well" not at all.

Focus Area #10 in the One Fairfax Policy reads: "A health and human services system where opportunities exist for all individuals and families to be safe, be healthy and realize their potential through the provision of accessible, high quality, affordable and culturally appropriate services." The County's ability to foster safe and healthy individuals and families depends on the accessibility of supportive services for our most marginalized residents. However, low-income immigrants often contend with unique challenges in accessing the social safety net, due to language barriers, misinformation about eligibility, cultural misunderstandings, and fears of deportation. Additionally, local immigrant communities are facing significant legal concerns, including rapid changes in immigration policies and considerable court backlogs. Access to culturally specific legal counsel can help immigrants find viable pathways to lawful immigration status, which in turn improves their access to educational and workforce opportunities, safety, and stability for themselves and their families. Access to culturally specific social services ensures immigrants can gain access to the social safety net and the benefits they qualify for, which improves financial stability for individuals and families. To meet the needs of the growing immigrant community, culturally specific service providers like Ayuda need increased funding.

Focus Area #2 in the One Fairfax Policy reads "Housing policies that encourage all who want to live in Fairfax to be able to do so, and the provision of a full spectrum of housing opportunities across the county, most notably those in mixed-use areas that are accessible to multiple modes of transport." The need for affordable housing in Fairfax County for low-income immigrants is critical. Ayuda's case managers help community members navigate unfamiliar systems and support their search for housing, most often in cases involving domestic violence. However, case managers report that they are having an increasingly difficult time in finding affordable housing for their immigrant clients, with individuals not being able to get on the waitlist for affordable housing. Furthermore, because federal rental assistance programs limit eligibility to those with 5 years as permanent residents, both undocumented and

documented immigrants face steep barriers to obtaining housing. This presents an additional challenge to immigrant survivors of domestic violence, whose ability to seek legal and social assistance is impeded by housing instability. Survivors and their children also face the psychological impacts of losing their communities and sources of support when they are forced to move from place to place as a result of housing instability. We urge Fairfax County to take into consideration the unique and complex needs of the growing immigrant community when making decisions regarding the provision of housing.

We look forward to continuing to participate in opportunities to provide public input on human services and housing for the Fairfax County immigrant community. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions regarding these comments.