

Tenant-Landlord Commission FY 2021 Annual Report



Fairfax County Tenant-Landlord Commission
December 1, 2021

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Tenant-Landlord Commission I would like to thank the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors for its continued trust in our guidance and advice on tenant-landlord issues. Over the last few years there have been major changes in the law with impacts being felt far beyond the private residence. This report is meant to help share trends within the tenant-landlord relationship so that informed decisions can be made. In addition to advising the County Supervisors, this report as available to the public is a helpful tool and reminder of services offered for community education, mediation, and arbitration services.

During FY 2021 Commission members adapted to a virtual working environment. The Commission, with support from Consumer Affairs Branch, continued to hold events virtually, coordinate complaint resolutions, advise landlord and tenants of the resources available to them, and be receptive to inputs from constituents.

In FY 2022 the Commission will continue to support the County's efforts to ensure that all Landlords and Tenants operate within the changing legal framework provided to them and to educate the public as changes occur. We are committed to making sure the Board of Supervisors receives the best guidance possible. I am extremely fortunate to lead the Commission as we continue to navigate the COVID landscape and with the support of County staff, I know the future is bright for all in Fairfax County.

Robert H. Chamberlain

Chairperson

Tenant Landlord Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tenant-Landlord Commission was established on October 27, 1971, by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The Commission gives objective and fair assistance to the County's tenants and landlords by providing presentations, publications, and programming.

The Commission also provides voluntary arbitration. A panel representative of the citizen, tenant, and landlord members of the Commission conducts a hearing that is legally binding on both parties and can be enforced in court if necessary. This dispute resolution alternative supports open communication between tenants and landlords without the expense or formality of a court hearing.

Staff support for the Commission is provided by the Consumer Services Division of the Department of Cable and Consumer Services.

The rental housing market in Fairfax County includes 83,077 rental housing complex units as of January 2020. The knowledge and information shared by the Commission adds value to the rental experience in Fairfax County.

In FY 2021 Consumer Affairs processed 1,804 inquiries from tenants and landlords about laws, lease agreements, security deposits, maintenance and repair, evictions, foreclosure, COVID-19, and other issues impacting rental dwellings. Voluntary mediation provided by Consumer Affairs offers tenants and landlords an open forum in which to resolve disputes and issues relating to rental dwelling units.

After voluntary mediation or arbitration is completed, the case is closed, and a summary outlining the details of the complaint is made available to the public on the County Web site. Reviewing closed case summaries, and the manner in which a complaint is resolved, provides an opportunity for tenants to have information they can use to determine if a rental dwelling will fit their need, expectation, and lifestyle.

The Commission participates with Consumer Affairs in providing community outreach to educate tenants and landlords on information and resources available through Consumer Affairs. Presentations are made throughout the year to housing providers, community groups, civic associations, senior centers, schools, and faith-based and non-profit organizations. Topics covered include tenant-landlord laws, applications, leases, security deposits, renter's insurance, maintenance and repairs, eviction, COVID-19, and County resources.

The Commission assists with the development of educational material in partnership with Consumer Affairs, Fairfax County Government Channel 16, other County agencies, and community stakeholders. Publications such as the *Lease Checklist*, *Tenant Resource Sheet*, and *Renting a Room in Fairfax County* provide guidance so tenants can make informed decisions, ensuring a safe, healthy, and quality rental experience.

Fairfax County Government Channel 16 televises educational programming on maintenance and repair obligations, bed bugs, and renter's insurance. Consumer Affairs also publishes tenant-landlord information and resources on Facebook and the County Web site.

Renting provides an option and choice for many in Fairfax County and the Commission is committed to creating awareness and knowledge of the services available for the tenant-landlord community. The Commission ensures both tenants and landlords are aware of their rights and responsibilities through education, information, mediation, and arbitration.

TENANT-LANDLORD COMMISSION

Robert H. Chamberlain
 Chairperson
 Public Member

Shahana Begum Islam
 Condo Owner Member

Karen Geier-Smith
 Vice Chairperson-Landlord
 Landlord Member

Perez Otonde
 Tenant Member

Paula Park
 Secretary
 Landlord Member

Anup Nair
 Tenant Member

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors established the Tenant-Landlord Commission on October 27, 1971, pursuant to Fairfax County Code Section 12-2-1, to provide assistance and information to educate the public on tenant-landlord matters regarding rental dwelling units in Fairfax County.

The Commission is composed of Fairfax County residents appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The Commission was originally composed of nine members; four tenant members, four landlord members, and one member of the community at large. On September 23, 1974, the Board of Supervisors adjusted the membership to include three landlord members, three tenant members, and three citizen members. On April 27, 1981, a condominium member was added. Currently the Commission is composed of 10 members; three landlord members, three tenant members, one condominium member, and three citizen members.

The business of the Commission is guided by the Bylaws adopted by a majority vote of the Commission members and approved by the Board of Supervisors.

The mission of the Commission is to give objective and fair assistance to Fairfax County tenants and landlords.

The duties of the Commission are to:

- Educate the public concerning the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords;
- Inform tenants and landlords of the mediation and arbitration services available through Consumer Affairs and the Commission;
- Arbitrate tenant-landlord complaints;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors of tenant-landlord problems and trends;
- Represent Fairfax County before legislative, public, and private bodies; and,
- Recommend changes in tenant-landlord laws at all levels of government.

During FY 2020, the Commission meetings included the following items:

TLC ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE – AUGUST 2020

The Commission nominated a slate of candidates for Vice Chairperson-Landlord, Vice Chairperson-Tenant, and Secretary. Director Michael Liberman provided an overview of the status of Fairfax County Government and the work performed by the Department of Cable and Consumer Services.

TENANT-LANDLORD COMMISSION BUSINESS – OCTOBER 2020

The Commission discussed Commissioner matters.

TLC FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT, TLC BYLAWS DRAFT, AND TLC NOMINATION OF OFFICERS – DECEMBER 2020

Director Michael Liberman presented the FY 2020 Annual Report to the Commission. Rebecca Makely, Director, Consumer Services Division, provided an overview of the draft TLC Bylaws. The Commission nominated a slate of candidates for Chairperson, Vice Chairperson-Landlord, Vice Chairperson-Tenant, and Secretary.

TLC ELECTIONS OF OFFICERS – APRIL 2021

The Commission elected officers for Chairperson, Vice Chairperson-Landlord, Vice Chairperson-Tenant, and Secretary.

ONE FAIRFAX POLICY – MAY 2021

The Commission watched the One Fairfax Policy Video.

The Commission meetings are open to the public with time available for public comment.

Additional information on the Commission, including this annual report, is available on the Commission Web site at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/csd/tenant-landlord-commission>.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The efforts and work by the Department of Cable and Consumer Services was accomplished with the majority of staff teleworking and those required to be onsite having adopted protocols necessary to conduct work in a safe manner. The Department of Cable and Consumer Services created and posted Coronavirus-related consumer advice posts on social media. Consumer Affairs continues to have a strong social media presence, posting consumer advice posts in reference to COVID-19, scams, price gouging, evictions, utility providers, and more. Consumer Affairs participated in virtual consumer outreach events and produced a special edition of the television show, *Your Community, You're Connected*, to provide resources to homeowner and community associations on how to navigate electronic meetings and other member issues. Regulation and Licensing processed license applications on an as-needed basis and was a resource for the community on towing and solicitation during this time. Staff also prepared the Government Center Conference Center to serve as a vaccination clinic activated by the Fairfax County Health Department in January 2021 and still in operation. The Department of Cable and Consumer Services remains responsive to the changing conditions and requirements in order to fulfil the agency mission during the pandemic.

[Stay Informed about Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Fairfax County](#)

DCCS Announcements.

The Department of Cable and Consumer Services (DCCS) will continue to be available to the public by telephone at 703-222-8435, TTY 711, or email at consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov.

If you have an open complaint, please contact the assigned Consumer Specialist preferably by email.

- **CONSUMER COMPLAINT:** File an online consumer [complaint form](#).
- **TENANT-LANDLORD:** Read the updated [Eviction Process](#).
- **SCAMS:** Stay alert for Coronavirus (COVID) [Scams](#).
- **UTILITIES:** Review the list of [utilities](#) suspending service disconnections, offering other billing options.
- **PRICE-GOUGING:** Understand the [Virginia Disaster Anti-Price Gouging Act](#).

TENANT-LANDLORD ARBITRATION

A voluntary and legally-binding [arbitration process](#) is available through the Commission when mediation efforts are exhausted by Consumer Affairs. Arbitration provides an efficient and inexpensive alternative to court for resolving tenant-landlord disputes. An arbitration panel consists of a citizen, tenant, and landlord member from the Commission. Hearings are scheduled at the convenience of the tenant and landlord.

In FY 2021, the Commission received no requests for arbitration.

RENTAL HOUSING MARKET IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax County offers a broad variety of housing for rent. Potential renters can choose from single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, and apartments. According to the October 2020, [Rental Housing Complex Analysis](#), prepared by the Fairfax County Department of Management and Budget, as of January 2020, there were 83,077 rental housing complex apartments, and townhouses in Fairfax County. This represents an increase of 1,576, or 1.9 percent, rental units on the market between January 2019 and January 2020.

The total inventory of available rental units is actually greater because this number does not include units leased by individual owners, public housing units, and privately owned subsidized housing complexes.

Average fair market monthly rent in the County for complexes without rent subsidies was \$1,787 in January 2020. This is \$90 lower than reported in January 2019, representing a 4.8 percent decrease. The vacancy rate for all rental complexes, those with and without subsidies, was estimated to be 5.5 percent as of January 2020.

The County created the [Eviction Prevention Task Force](#) to coordinate a county-wide approach to providing assistance to vulnerable residents by bringing together County agencies and non-profit partners in a collaborative effort to connect residents to services. The Web site includes data, resources, and information for those dealing with possible eviction in Fairfax County.

As the County continues to redevelop and grow, the Commission and Consumer Affairs will continue to provide education and information to residents on the evolving rental housing market in Fairfax County.

TENANT-LANDLORD INQUIRIES

Consumer Affairs responds to inquiries for information, offers advice, provides referrals, and assists tenants and landlords with mediation.

Inquiries include complaints, advice, and customer walk-ins. Inquiries vary from month to month for a variety of reasons such as holidays, tax season, weather, school, and travel.

During FY 2021, Consumer Affairs responded to 1,804 inquiries from tenants and landlords. Inquiries were received about laws, lease agreements, security deposits, maintenance and repair, evictions, foreclosure, and other issues impacting rental dwellings.

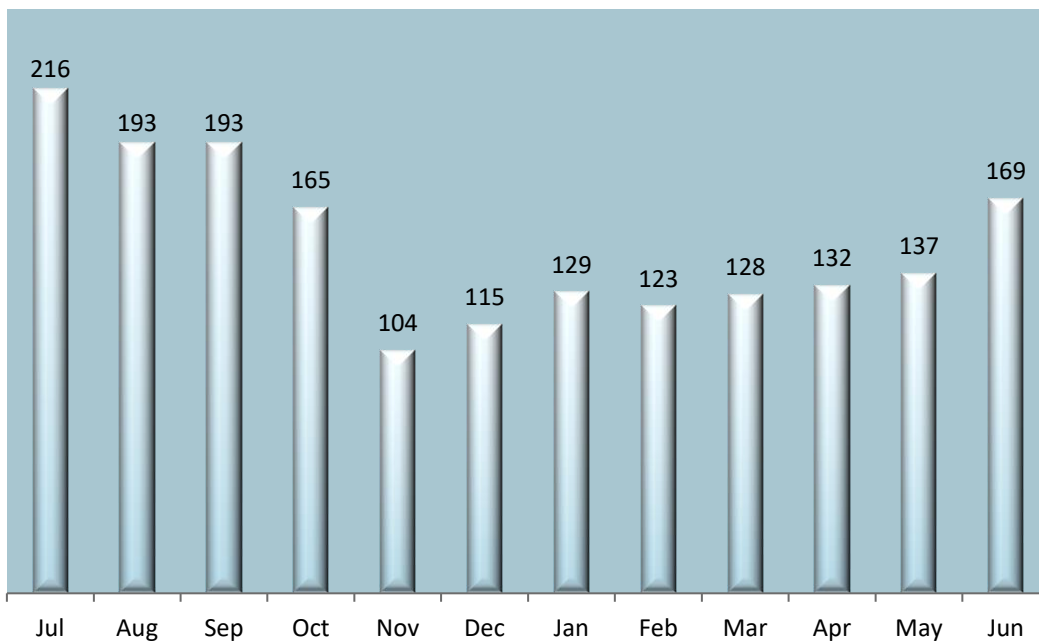


Figure 1 Tenant-Landlord Inquiries for Fiscal Year 2021

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

A tenant may also file a complaint with Consumer Affairs. Through mediation, a Consumer Specialist works with the tenant and landlord to assist both parties in reaching a favorable resolution to the complaint.

In FY 2021, Consumer Affairs mediated 240 tenant-landlord complaints. Consumer Affairs publishes [case summaries](#) of all closed complaints within the last 12 months on the County Web site. Reviewing complaint summaries offers tenants an overview of Consumer Affairs mediation efforts and can also provide helpful information on rental dwellings in Fairfax County.

Complaint summaries featuring comments from consumers satisfied with the mediation provided by Consumer Affairs are highlighted below:

MOLD REMEDIATION

Gladis, the tenant, rents a home from a private landlord. The tenant requested mediation for mold in the home. The tenant stated the landlord failed to remediate the mold after repeated requests. After Consumer Affairs intervention and mediation, the landlord provided an invoice to show the mold remediation work was completed to the tenant’s satisfaction.

“I WANT TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK YOU FOR SERVICE, SUPPORT, AND HONEST INTENTIONS TO HELP MY FAMILY ON THIS CASE.”

GLADIS

SECURITY DEPOSIT

“I RECEIVED THE REFUND. THANK YOU SO MUCH.”

SANIA

Sania, the tenant, rented a townhome from a private landlord. The tenant was on a month-to-month lease agreement. The tenant gave the landlord a 30 day notice vacate as required by the lease agreement. The tenant vacated the townhome and the landlord failed to return the security deposit per the lease agreement. After Consumer Affairs intervention and mediation, the landlord returned the security deposit of \$720 to the tenant’s satisfaction.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Commission and Consumer Affairs analyze trends and issues of concern in response to complaints received and mediated by staff. This analysis is used to develop educational information for outreach, publications, and programming.

Consumer Affairs provides outreach presentations throughout the year to housing providers, community groups, civic associations, senior centers, schools, and faith-based and non-profit organizations.

The Commission participates with Consumer Affairs in providing community outreach to educate tenants and landlords on information and resources available through Consumer Affairs.

Consumer Affairs conducted 109 outreach events in FY 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability for in-person outreach events to take place; however, staff was able to participate in virtual outreach events. Additionally, worked with Fairfax County Public Schools to develop a virtual curriculum for a high school consumer program which launched in the middle of FY 2021 and continues to be available.

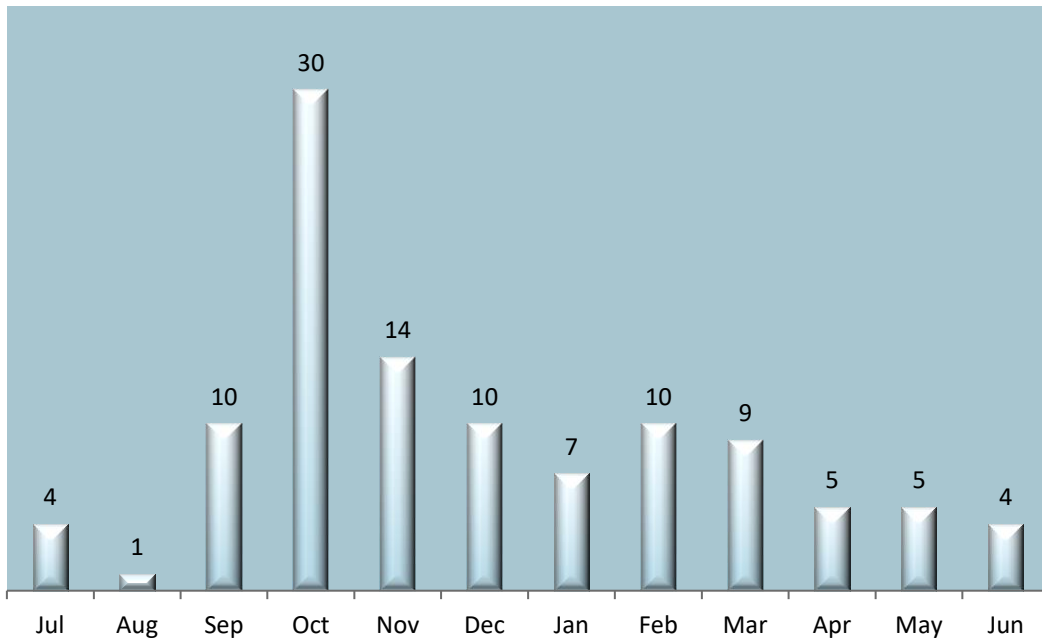


Figure 2 Community Outreach Events for Fiscal Year 2021

Consumer Affairs offers presentations on the following topics:

- Consumer Affairs 101
- Building a Better Credit Report
- Data Breaches
- Door to Door Scams
- Financial Education
- Funeral Planning
- High School 101
- Home Improvement
- How to Block Unwanted Calls
- Identity Theft
- Managing Expenses and Debt During COVID-19
- Medical Identity Theft
- Online Shopping
- Scams Against Seniors
- What Landlords Need to Know
- What Tenants Need to Know

Consumer Affairs coordinates with many Fairfax County entities to provide ongoing information and resources across a broad audience in Fairfax County.

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Consumer Affairs provided tenant information on a virtual housing fair platform. George Mason University encourages college students to understand their rights and responsibilities.

LEGAL SERVICES OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Consumer Affairs coordinates and collaborates with Legal Services of Northern Virginia to provide information and guidance to tenants and landlords in Fairfax County. Legal Services of Northern Virginia offers a variety of online self-help resources that provide legal forms and documents for tenants and landlords.

KATHERINE HANLEY FAMILY SHELTER

In coordination with Shelter House, Inc., Consumer Affairs provides information and resources to tenants entering for the first time or re-entering the rental market. Rights and responsibilities are discussed with a focus on services provided by the Commission, Consumer Affairs, and other County agencies.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA VIRTUAL HOUSING EXPO

The Commission and Consumer Affairs share information regarding tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities and, highlight the services and resources available for tenants and landlords in Fairfax County as well as resources such as the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act that apply to tenants and landlords throughout Virginia.

These efforts keep the Commission, Consumer Affairs, and communities connected and invested in maintaining livable neighborhoods.

TENANT-LANDLORD PUBLICATIONS

As residents of the County and in active service in the tenant-landlord community, Commissioners bring knowledge and expertise about rental situations and dwellings. Their collective knowledge is used to develop the following educational publications for the tenant-landlord community.

LEASE CHECKLIST

The checklist provides guidance for prospective tenants and landlords and outlines the rights, responsibilities, and obligations involved with a lease agreement.

TENANT RESOURCE SHEET

The resource sheet provides information for tenants on which County agency to contact for assistance with repair or maintenance problems in their rental dwelling. Tenants are encouraged to contact their landlord or property manager first when there is a problem, but if they do not get the help they need, they can contact the appropriate County agency to address their issue.

WHAT TENANTS AND LANDLORDS NEED TO KNOW BROCHURE

The brochure provides answers to frequently asked questions by tenants and landlords regarding laws, lease agreements, security deposits, rent, maintenance and repairs, and eviction. Information about how to contact Consumer Affairs to discuss a dispute or file a complaint is included.

ENERGY-SAVING TIPS FOR RENTERS

The tips recommend ways to save money by improving energy efficiency. Reducing energy consumption and protecting the environment provide real savings for both renters and landlords.

RENTING A ROOM IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

For many, renting a room is the first step into the residential rental market. Resources are provided to equip prospective tenants with information to help them select a room that best meets their individual housing needs and lifestyle.

VIRGINIA STATEMENT OF TENANT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This document provides summary information on Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities under the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act and the [Manufactured Home Lot Rental Act](#). This document is also available in Spanish with additional languages coming soon.

THE INFORMED TENANT AND LANDLORD NEWSLETTER

This newsletter provides clear and concise information and resources with important contact information to quickly connect tenants and landlords with agencies ready to provide guidance and assistance on issues such as lease agreements, renting, fair housing, maintenance, fire safety, eviction, and mediation provided by Consumer Affairs.

Consumer Affairs publishes this information on social media, the Consumer Services Division Web site at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/csd/tenant-landlord> and Fairfax County Government Channel 16 at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/fairfax-county-government-television>.

TENANT-LANDLORD VIDEO PROGRAMMING

Consumer Affairs develops educational programming on a variety of tenant-landlord issues. The programs below are available on Fairfax County Government Channel 16, Video-on-Demand on the County Web site, and Facebook.

Bed Bugs

This program provides an overview on how tenants and landlords can detect and defend against bed bugs. Guidance and information is provided by Consumer Affairs, the Fairfax County Health Department, American Pest Management, and Southern Management Corporation.

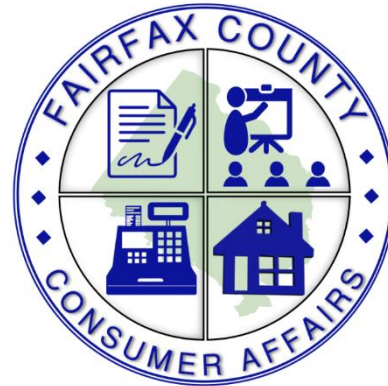
Renter's Insurance PSA 1 and Renter's Insurance PSA 2

The Commission presents public service announcements to encourage tenants to obtain renter's insurance. The announcements highlight the need for tenants to protect their personal property from events such as flood, fire, theft, and accidental injury to others. Information is provided in coordination with a [brochure](#) from the Virginia Bureau of Insurance of the Virginia State Corporation Commission.

CONSUMER CONNECTION

Consumer Affairs hosts a monthly Facebook Live program on consumer topics, such as Covid-19 Scams, Tenant and Landlord Responsibilities during the Pandemic, Scam Trends during COVID-19, Consumer Update for Fairfax County Residents, Holiday Scams, Covid-19 Scams, Resources Provided by Consumer Affairs, Medical Billing, Funeral Planning, and Tenant-Landlord 101. Viewers are able to comment with questions that are answered in real-time during the online program. The featured chats can be viewed on the Consumer Affairs Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcountyconsumer>.

Consumer Affairs regularly posts to social media on relevant consumer information including tips, warnings, and resources. Commissioners also share consumer tips with fellow constituents. Following are several examples advising the public of relevant consumer issues and information:



IN REVIEW

With over four decades of service to the tenant-landlord community, the Commission remains committed to keeping tenants and landlords informed in response to housing trends, issues, and challenges such as COVID-19. The balanced membership of the Commission ensures that all residents of Fairfax County have a voice and that tenants and landlords have a consistent, reliable source for obtaining information to help them understand their rights, responsibilities, and obligations.

The expertise, knowledge, and commitment of the Commission provides assurance that tenants and landlords can enjoy being a part of a neighborhood that not only provides a great place to live, work, and explore, but also a place they can call home.

Fairfax County Tenant-Landlord Commission

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703-222-8435 TTY 711

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/csd/tenant-landlord-commission>

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/csd/consumer>

<https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcountyconsumer>



To request this information in an alternate format, call the Department of Cable and Consumer Services, 703-222-8435 TTY 711.



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