

Good evening, and thank you for allowing me to testify before you this evening. My name is Diane Hoyer, chair of the county's Commission for Women. I come before you in support of several initiatives and to inform you of how the advertised budget will impact the Office for Women & Domestic and Sexual Violence Services.

As background, I wanted to inform you of a survey the Commission sponsored last fall. The purpose of the survey was to allow us to attend to our constituents, and hear about the most important issues facing them today so that we, as a Commission, can champion the issues seen as most urgent by our community. With over 400 respondents, we discovered the top priorities are affordable housing, affordable childcare, family and career balance, education, healthcare, and domestic violence from those who completed the survey. I will speak to some of these this evening.

It is safe to say that funding the Housing Blueprint, particularly the Bridging Affordability Program, is a step in the right direction to help in the challenge of finding and securing affordable housing in Fairfax County by utilizing long-term rental subsidies, acquisition of housing, and short term emergency assistance. This is extremely important as most of those accessing these services will be families—many headed by women attempting to provide a stable home for their children. Without stable, safe, and affordable housing, attempting to meet life's other challenges is severely compromised.

Along with this, it is imperative that we continue our investment in the established Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. There is a direct correlation to those who are being served in the homeless shelters and those who have experienced Domestic Violence, as well over 50% of the adults (and accompanied children) being served in shelters have experienced Domestic Violence. *Many times, victims return to the offender because there is no place they can live that is affordable. If victims of Domestic Violence are afforded a choice in determining where they live, they may not feel as if they must return to the offender due to a lack of living arrangements.*

As indicated above, many respondents to the survey indicated affordable childcare is also significant. The average cost of full-time preschool child care can range from \$8,000 to \$12,000 per year—this is akin to college tuition. For those parents, especially single mothers in our community lack of affordable childcare can be a critical turning point to enroll in *OR* return to welfare programs (because they CAN NOT afford work) for many the children would be compromised by being placed in unsafe, unregulated child care settings. Research indicates parents' employment and economic independence are jeopardized without affordable childcare.

Finally, let me educate you on how the reductions publicized in the FY 2011 budget will impact the Office for Women & Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (OFWDSVS). The advertised budget proposes a reduction of 1 ½ positions (the liaison to the Commission and a part-time administrative assistant) to this office as well as cutting the translation and interpretation budget in half. While this may not seem as if it will have a huge impact, for a small agency, the impact is devastating!

Why?...First, all staff support to the Commission for Women has been eliminated. Think about the impact to the Human Services Council if all your county support were eliminated. Would you be able to efficiently get your work done? Would you be able to fully accomplish your mission? This means the Commission will no longer be able to provide essential community education, conduct strategic planning, and host resident surveys and forums that are germane to our engagement in policy formation. For example, it will be impossible for the Commission to sponsor the successful Women's Voices Forum, which has attracted close to 300 participants from around the region. The liaison is significant in coordinating this event. She leverages human capital and other resources to support this and other events. This is the largest gathering of women and girls in the county to discuss issues, and the open formats have supported authentic dialogue, feedback and engagement from the community and new stakeholders. She recruits new partners to assist with the goals and work of the CFW & OFWDSVS and coordinates special programs and projects and endorsed, supported and publicized the CFW to maximize outreach to women and girls in the county.

The liaison has a wide and varied reach into the federal, state and local community and has collaborated with public and private organizations to expand and define the work of the Commission. She is instrumental in helping the Commission leverage resources from the business community and local faith based groups to affect change for the women and girls of this county. A prime example of this is the assistance she provided the Commission which allowed us to participate in the Verizon HelpLine project. Because of the liaison's work on this endeavor, the Commission was able collect unused cell phones. The proceeds of this effort amounted to \$7,500 and went to help those accessing services through Artemis House—the county's only shelter committed to victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence as well as Human Trafficking. The liaison has been instrumental in encouraging the Commissioners to use our resources for events, outreach, and programming.

In addition, we will no longer be able to chair policy groups such as the one currently under way developing and incorporating a Domestic Violence in the Workplace provision to the county's Workplace Violence Policy. This has been a very successful endeavor whereby we were able to work with directors from various agencies in a short amount of time to accomplish this important work. Eliminating the liaison position means NO support at all! The liaison's resourcefulness, acumen for partnerships and collaboration expands the work of the Commission and this would certainly be lost without her.

The budget also calls for the elimination of a part-time administrative assistant. You will recall that Domestic Violence services from the Community Services Board were reorganized, redesigned, and transferred to the OFWDSVS. With this came the understanding that since many of the Domestic and Sexual Violence staff would remain in CSB offices, there was no need to transfer administrative support as well. However, the understanding was that if OFWDSVS staff were to ever move from CSB offices, a renegotiation of said administrative support would be discussed. As part of last year's Lines of Business process, several CSB offices were restructured and closed; OFWDSVS staff was asked to move from the Chantilly site, however no administrative support followed. In attempting to close this gap and meet the needs of the program, a part-time limited term administrative assistant position was established (by abolishing another position). Without this support, staff will spend more time on

administrative duties and less time in direct service. This will not help with the wait list of approximately 100 people wanting counseling services from the Victim Assistance Network.

I have briefly outlined several issues important to the residents of our community, especially women and their children and have also mentioned the impact the advertised budget has on the Office for Women & Domestic and Sexual Violence Services and the Commission for Women. I thank you for your time and appreciate your attention.