

Response to Questions on the FY 2015 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Herrity

Question: The Budget Consideration Item reduction “*Eliminate the Consumer Affairs Branch*” has been requested. Provide a summary of the reduction including the impact it would have.

Response: Fairfax County’s Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB) is authorized by the Code of Virginia §15.2-963, to resolve consumer complaints by means of voluntary mediation or arbitration under the Virginia Consumer Protection Act. This is accomplished with a General Fund budget of \$635,376. This total includes seven full time positions: 1/1.0 FTE Consumer Specialist III, 2/2.0 FTE Consumer Specialists II, 2/2.0 FTE Consumer Specialists I, 1/1.0 FTE Administrative Assistant IV, and 1/1.0 FTE Administrative Assistant II. There are four additional positions: 1/1.0 FTE Consumer Specialists II, 1/1.0 FTE Consumer Specialist I, and 2/2.0 FTE Administrative Assistants II which are fully funded by the County’s Cable Fund as these positions support cable-related complaints. The elimination of this program would result in the reduction of seven positions which are fully supported by the General Fund. The remaining four positions fully supported by the Cable Fund would be reassigned within the agency and would continue to provide cable-related services.

The Consumer Affairs Branch mediated 1,195 complaints and responded to 6,119 advice inquiries while recovering savings of over \$560,000 for Fairfax County consumers in FY 2013. Additionally, the branch conducts over 160 community outreach events, including topics on the home and community, online safety, scams, finances, and shopping; publishes the quarterly Informed Consumer e-Newsletter and podcast; provides staff support to the Consumer Protection Commission and Tenant-Landlord Commission; educates and supports over 2,000 homeowners’ associations, condominium unit owners’ associations, and civic associations; and hosts the *Your Community Your Call* consumer television program shown on Fairfax County Government Channel 16.

This reduction would result in the elimination of local mediation and arbitration for consumers conducting business in Fairfax County. Consumers with tenant-landlord, auto repair, home improvement, and other complaints would have to contact the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Office of the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection section or initiate litigation. Over 2,000 community associations would no longer have a source for information about common interest communities. Consumer educational seminars held with FCPS, civic associations, and the faith community would be discontinued. Community outreach efforts such as Channel 16 programming, newsletters, and podcasts would end. The County’s Tenant-Landlord Commission would be abolished as there would be no staff support or County services provided in this area. While Consumer Affairs has a net cost of \$635,376 in FY 2015, staff recovered \$560,261 for Fairfax County consumers in FY 2013.