



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

Fairfax County Human Services Council

Educating ♦ Supporting ♦ Engaging
the Fairfax Community

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DATE: March 24, 2022

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Michele Menapace, Chair, Human Services Council
Alis Wang, Chair, Human Services Budget Committee

SUBJECT: FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan Recommendations

The Human Services Council, which since its founding in 1988 has advised the Board of Supervisors on Health and Human Services (HHS) issues throughout the County, offers the following recommendations on the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan. The Council appreciates the Board of Supervisors' past and ongoing attention to these important priority items that affect the most vulnerable of our County's residents.

We recognize that the Board of Supervisors is considering reducing the tax rate. If the Board decides to do so, we recommend that it proceed prudently. More specifically, the County Executive's FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan includes \$79.26 million in unallocated revenues that the Board may use to offset significant increases in real estate assessments by cutting the real estate tax rate. Should the Board choose to reduce the real estate tax rate and associated revenues by more than the \$79.26 million available in the County Executive's proposed budget, the Human Services Council urges the Board not to cut HHS programs to find offsetting spending reductions.

The past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected every resident but have disproportionately impacted communities of color, people with disabilities, low-income residents, and seniors at risk in Fairfax County. It is clearer than ever how integral HHS are to the success, well-being, and vitality of our community. As we forge ahead, it is critical to prioritize County investments that reduce inequities, fuel economic growth, and expand access to vital support and services in our HHS system.

The Council supports the FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan's investments in HHS priorities to address the challenges our community is facing, including economic recovery, mental health, the opioid epidemic, and affordable housing. Strategic investments in HHS are inextricably linked to a robust economy and a safe and healthy community that is resilient and provides equitable opportunities for all residents. The Human Services Council is engaged with other boards, authorities, and commissions (BACs) in the HHS system regarding their budget priorities, which are reflected in the following funding items supported by the Council. These funding items are listed alphabetically and are not ranked or prioritized. Our partners in the other HHS BACs have a unique expertise in the specific population or focal area they represent and will provide the Board with more details on the specific budget impacts during their testimonies at the upcoming budget hearings.

Affordable Housing: The Human Services Council is pleased that an additional \$5 million will be invested in quality, affordable housing in the County. The pandemic has demonstrated how precarious housing stability is to many residents, especially the 45% of renters who are cost-burdened and spend at least 30% of their household income on rent. The \$5 million increase to the baseline budget, coupled with federal stimulus dollars, will help address the deficit of 31,000 affordable rental homes in the County, as well as the 15,000 additional units needed due to the County's population growth. In addition, the Council strongly supports the Board's recent decision to adopt a new goal of producing at least 10,000 new affordable housing units by 2034. We recommend that the County combine dedicated local funding with other funding sources like ARPA, Moving to Work, CDBG, and the Housing Trust Fund to accelerate the production of affordable housing.

Consolidated Community Funding Pool: The Human Services Council recognizes the tremendous value that community-based organizations (CBOs) provide to residents. CBOs play an integral role in the HHS system, and the 5% increase to the Consolidated Community Funding Pool will help our community partners continue to deliver high-quality services to our residents.

Co-Responder Model: The Human Services Council is grateful for the County's commitment to the Diversion First initiative, which enables residents with mental health issues, substance use disorders, and/or developmental disabilities to receive treatment and support instead of criminal justice involvement. The \$3.78 million investment in the Co-Responder Model supports that initiative by ensuring that both a behavioral health crisis intervention specialist and Crisis Intervention Team-trained police officer respond to emergency calls for behavioral health issues.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program: The Human Services Council supports the \$1.1 million allocated for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The state's COVID-19 eviction moratorium will end in June 2022 so it is imperative that resources are available to help residents struggling to pay rent, which will prevent further homelessness in our community.

Employee Compensation: The Human Services Council recognizes that recruiting and retaining skilled and experienced staff is fundamental to a high-performing and robust HHS system. Many staff worked on the frontlines during the pandemic to ensure our residents had access to healthcare, child care, housing, support services, and other basic needs assistance. Investing in our workforce will ensure that residents continue to receive high-quality and equitable services and programs that the County has a strong reputation for providing.

HHS Contracts: The Council supports a rate increase of at least \$2.3 million for contracts with HHS agencies because of the important role that these providers play in carrying out many of the services in the County. These organizations are experiencing the same recruitment and retention issues as County agencies.

Opioids and Substance Use: The opioid epidemic continues to have a profound impact on our community with local hospitals reporting a 13% increase in emergency room visits for overdoses in 2021. In the Fairfax Health District, opioids are the leading cause of unnatural death. The Human Services Council supports the additional positions and funding for the Detoxification and Residential Treatment Services to address this crisis.

Opportunity Neighborhoods: The Council requests that the Board provide funding to expand the highly successful Opportunity Neighborhoods program into a sixth area of the County. This will ensure that children, youth, and families -- particularly those who have been impacted by the pandemic -- have the support and resources necessary to thrive in the community.

Services for Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities: The Human Services Council recommends that the Board consider the growth in our aging population and the 87,000 County residents with disabilities and fund the additional Social Services Specialists positions requested by the Department of Family Services for its Adult Protective Services, Adult Services, and Nutrition programs so that older adults and adults with disabilities can live independently and age in place in our community.

The Human Services Council thanks the Board of Supervisors for its ongoing support of HHS, as well as County Executive Bryan Hill, Deputy County Executive Chris Leonard, and Chief Financial Officer Christina Jackson for their leadership in ensuring that key priorities are funded. The Human Services Council also recognizes the boards, authorities and commissions in HHS and our community partners for their commitment to making Fairfax County a place where individuals and families can be safe, healthy, and realize their full potential.

We look forward to sharing our presentation and having a discussion with you about these budget priorities on March 29.