



County of Fairfax, Virginia

Fairfax County Human Services Council

Educating ♦ Supporting ♦ Engaging
the Fairfax Community

DATE: April 21, 2025

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Michele Menapace, Chair
Paul Thomas, Budget Committee Co-Chair
Jane Edmondson, Budget Committee Co-Chair

SUBJECT: FY 2026 Advertised Budget: Creative Solutions for Challenging Times

The only certainty in these uncertain times is that our most vulnerable residents will find it even more challenging to obtain needed assistance for food, housing, health care and important resources for children. Because we are confident the Board of Supervisors will rely on several approaches to finding the savings and revenue needed to maintain our county's longstanding commitment to these and other important programs, the Human Services Council offers our most pressing recommendations for priority attention.

These recommendations and suggestions are the result of our own investigations and research, a review of the Strategic Allocation of Resources (StAR) plan, and suggestions urged by other health & human services Boards, Authorities and Commissions, notably in our council's recent summit and survey.

Priorities

In addition to funding the HHS programs that the Advertised Budget already supports, the Council strongly urges the Board to maintain its commitment to the following vital programs and services, primarily because they reach so many individuals and families. This recommendation comes with the recognition that prevention & intervention efforts are proven to be more effective and less costly. These programs are, in our estimation, vital to these ends.

- **Middle School After School Program:** This program is a safe haven for middle school youth to improve academic achievement and student behavior overall while reducing imperiling behavior, in particular.
- **Transition Services for Students with Developmental Disabilities:** These services are both required and critical. With federal funding for these services potentially at risk, the county needs to step up to ensure services to one of our most vulnerable populations doesn't disappear.
- **Preserve Supportive and Inclusion Services Provided at the Senior Centers:** Care management, social work, in-home care, and access to programs like Elderlink and the Home Care Registry are sound public investments. The Board

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must ensure that Senior Centers have the staffing required to maintain high-quality services.

- **General Relief for Disabled Adults:** Disabled individuals are in particular need of our support. The justification for the reduction indicates (in part) that participation in this program has declined thanks to Medicaid Expansion. There is reason to worry that Medicaid Expansion will be reversed by the current federal administration, and we need to ensure that the most vulnerable of our residents are provided the support they need so acutely.
- **Don't Give Up on Opportunity Neighborhoods.** Meaningful community development requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort to identify areas in most need of improvement.

The Urgency of Efficiency and Innovation

In times of scarcity, budget effectiveness and efficiency are critical. Eliminating the Data Analytics Unit and Healthy Minds Fairfax Program Evaluation will hinder the county's ability to identify what services are needed and what solutions work. Decentralization can be good, but some efforts are best done with support from centralized resources.

There are at least a half dozen instances in the StAR Plan indicating reductions that will be mitigated by redistributing work to "existing," "remaining," or "current" staff. Many of these examples are concerning on their own, but the collective redistribution could overwhelm already hardworking staff and reduce the quality of services. The HSC urges the Board to consider the implications of diminishing returns by such demands on our workforce.

FCPS school nurse staffing offers an excellent model for nimble program innovation in response to system challenges. There have been many years of unfilled vacancies, primarily due to nursing shortages. Now, a 5-year transition from existing staffing models will not only save money but has great potential to ensure a licensed nurse will be in every school.

The Council is mindful of the Board of Supervisors' sustained interest in alternative means of financing and delivering important HHS programs. The HHS Innovation Fund, easily the most creative approach to service funding and delivery in the HHS area, has now made possible several pilot projects that have been identified by the county as excellent candidates for alternative funding and delivery mechanisms. The county has approached the council no fewer than five times in the past two years with demonstration program suggestions in priority areas. Don't eliminate the HHS Innovation Fund.

Leveraging Diverse Revenue Sources

As the Board of Supervisors considers new revenue streams, we urge you to remember the value they could provide: the ability to shore up and properly fund critical health and human services in keeping with the commitments made to residents over decades. As federal safety nets become less reliable, the county needs to ensure that our residents are safe, healthy, and thriving.

The Council recognizes that the Board is inclined to use new revenue streams to decrease the real estate tax rate. We strongly encourage you to maximize the rate for the food and beverage tax. This will help ensure that there is enough revenue to fund critical human services needs, including those articulated above that have been marked for reduction.

Conclusion

Fairfax County remains a great place to live, learn, work and play. Since 1988, the Human Services Council has helped ensure that all our residents can enhance the quality of life for their families by advising the Board of Supervisors on programs and services that both fill a gap and advance the quality of life here. But as resident volunteers we recognize that it is only through the determination of our elected county leadership and professional management team that we can achieve these goals. The Council is aware of the tough decisions required of this Board, the County Executive, Bryan Hill, the Deputy County Executive for HHS, Chris Leonard, the Chief Financial Officer, Christina Jackson, and our Chief Equity Officer, Toni Zollicoffer.

On behalf of the tens of thousands of individuals and families who seek only to live their lives to the fullest potential, we thank you all.