

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: OCTOBER 10, 2023

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR & MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

CC: JIM PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

FROM: COUNCILWOMAN ALYIA GASKINS

SUBJECT: ALEXANDRIA FUND FOR HUMAN SERVICES (AFHS)

At the September 26, 2023, legislative meeting, the City Council had a lengthy discussion on Docket Item # 9 concerning the review of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) FY 2024 to FY 2026 Grantmaking Process and Recommendations for Improvements. The purpose of this memo is to summarize that discussion and clarify suggested next steps.

Since its inception, the AFHS has served as a critical resource for the community by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable residents. Today, those needs are significant. Alexandrians continue to navigate the lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic, rising housing and childcare costs, and inflation pressures. Approximately 19,000 Alexandria renter and homeowner households with incomes up to \$75,000 are cost burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing with few resources left over for essentials such as food and healthcare.

While staff and the reform committee have put forward several important recommendations related to the grantmaking process and communications, now is the opportune time to review the key purpose of the fund.

We must ensure that this resource is structured in a way that is truly responsive to the growing and changing needs of our community. As discussed at the legislative meeting, to maximize the impact of the AFHS, the city more fully should review, reexamine, and explore:

- The scale of human services needs in the City of Alexandria
 - Questions to consider:
 - Who is most burdened in our community? Which vulnerable population subgroups should be prioritized?
 - What needs are seeing the greatest increase?
 - What is our community's data showing us?
- The intended result of the AFHS
 - Questions to consider:
 - What is the change we are seeking? What will be different for priority populations?
 - How does the fund fit into the larger work of the city to meet human service needs?

- What does research show are best practices and effective approaches to achieve the desired impacts?
- The essential services needed to address the intended result.
 - Are there services nonprofits can provide more flexibly, more swiftly, and more directly than the government?
 - How do we identify which nonprofits have the capacity to create the change we are seeking?
- The best channels/mechanisms to support these essential services.
 - Questions to consider:
 - Is a competitive fund the right financial structure to meet human service needs? If not, should it be accompanied by direct contracts?
 - Is it the right size? If not, does it need to be expanded?
 - If the city has identified certain services as essential, should they be part of City Departmental budgets through contractual services and not funded through AFHS competitive grants process?
 - Should AFHS provide partial funding vs. full funding, innovation vs. ongoing services, time limited commitments vs. continuous funding?
 - How can AFHS more strategically leverage other local, state and federal funding to meet human service needs?
- The process for evaluating the success and impact of the fund.

This report should be presented to Council and set for a public hearing for community response.

As discussed at the legislative meeting, staff is supportive of these recommendations, some of which were provided by members of the Alexandria Council of Human Service Organization's (ACHSO) Education and Advocacy Committee to City Council on August 31, 2023. However, additional capacity is needed.

This research will likely require outside consultant support and should be completed in partnership with the City's non-profit partners and key stakeholders. It should also consider the practices of neighboring jurisdictions with similar funding processes for non-profits. Some members of Council have also suggested an academic partnership for this research. Staff should determine the capacity needed, cost, and best approach.

There are nearly three years between now and the next grant awards. If we simply tinker with the current process, we miss an opportunity to strategically reimagine how best to use our limited resources to meet the needs of the individuals and families we hope to serve.

CC:

Kate Garvey, Director of the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)
Kendel Taylor, Interim Deputy City Manager