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3-15-25

Good Morning Mayor Gaskins, vice mayor Bagley and members of city council

My name is Sindy, Youth Organizer with Tenants and Workers United. Our youth chapter, Alexandria United Teens, has been actively advocating for over 2 decades in issues that relate to their education system, and areas that directly impact them such as housing, immigration, and healthcare accessibility. Our youth group is composed of Alexandria youth ages 12-18 that attend Alexandria City Public Schools.

As youth attend school most of their day, they are experts of what occurs daily, what resources are available and what their needs are. Youth have had the opportunity to share concerns and their stories with school board leaders, superintendent and staff but are not heard, and the needs are not prioritized.

I am here today along with some of our youth members to emphasize our message about our current school system. The outcomes of graduations rates, SOL passing rates, suspensions, arrests and referrals, where students of color are under and over-represented show significant concerns. ACPS continues to add little to no funds to programming like the restorative practices, academic and career plans, college and career readiness, school based counselors, psychologists, social workers and caring adults. We continue to see the trends and disproportionate numbers due to ACPS lack of investment, implementation of programming, lack of accountability and data collection.

We know that city council funds the majority of ACPS' budget and need you to reflect on what is actually happening with the student outcomes. It is also city council's responsibility to oversee the final results ACPS funding is bringing towards students. We hope city council steps up its leadership to make sure all students are served, and the funds are best utilized with fidelity to make sure all students succeed in our public schools.

We are also attaching our one-pager with data in regard to the data that shows the outcomes of students in ACPS for you to review. Thank you allowing me to speak today.



The Problem: ACPS's Lack of Accountability Keeps Our Students Failing

Many ACPS students do not feel supported at school.

In 2023, Alexandria United Teens created and conducted a questionnaire where...

- **1 in 5** said they do not have the support they need to be successful in school.
- **35%** were unable to identify a member of ACPS staff they could go to for support with academic, social, and emotional issues they experience in school.
- **45%** listed academic support among the top three concerns at their school, while **44%** named concerns with the school environment, such as not feeling welcomed or connections with peers, teachers, and counselors.

ACPS's current school climate, lack of investment in proper implementation and evaluation of programs, and zero-tolerance policies harm students of color the most.

During the 2023-2024 school year...

- **77% of ACPS students who dropped out were Hispanic**, and 55% were English Learners.
- Only **77.7% of Hispanic students and 87.3% of black students graduated on time**, compared with 97.4% of white students.
- Black students accounted for **50.3% of short-term suspensions**, 100% of long-term suspensions, and 100% of expulsions at Alexandria City High School, despite representing only 24.8% of the student population.
- Black and Latinx students continue to receive fewer academic opportunities than their white peers, resulting in a **disparity in reading pass rates** of more than 20 percentage points between Black and white students, and 38 percentage points between Hispanic and white students.

The Solution: Fully Implement and Monitor Holistic Programs with Proven Benefits for Students of Color

Re-invest in holistic programs with a history of success – not punitive zero-tolerance policies.

- Individual Academic and Career Plans (ICAPs) were introduced at T.C. Williams in 2008-2012. They resulted in **significantly increased reading SOL pass rates for Hispanic and Black students** as well as **improved on-time graduation rates** for both Black students (from 76% to 82%) and Hispanic students (from 58% to 70%).
- A restorative practices program piloted at T.C. Williams in 2010-2014 resulted in a nearly **70% drop in suspensions**, from 251 in 2010-2011 to 78 in 2013-2014.
- However, despite these initial successes, **both programs have failed to receive sustained funding and implementation within ACPS.**

Our Demands

ACPS school board, superintendent and leadership must...

- Center the **needs and voices of students** in this year's budget process.
- Take accountability for the educational success of **all ACPS students**.
- Re-invest in **holistic programs with proven positive outcomes** for Black, Latinx, and English Learner students, including the Academic and Career Plan and restorative practices.
- Commit to **evaluation, monitoring, accountability, and transparency** in the implementation of all programs.



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Good Morning Mayor, Vice Mayor and City Council Members,

My name is Nathaly Zelaya, and I'm a Community Organizer with Tenants and Workers United. For almost 40 years, TWU has been dedicated to working with communities of color, immigrants, women, youth, and low-wage workers. Our mission is to empower individuals within these communities to improve their quality of life in the City of Alexandria.

We are here today, as we have been for the past five years, to emphasize that our community continues to be neglected in the City's priorities. Over the past five years, we have held numerous meetings, providing you with opportunities to hear directly from community members about the struggles they face due to the lack of affordable housing in the city. Many of you supported housing and affordability in your last political campaigns, including those that attended our all city council candidate forum back in 2021.

Some of you have shared that you have lived in Alexandria for many years and are renters yourselves. However, the renter experience is not universal. Our families are at the lowest income levels, and paying the rent has become increasingly impossible for them. Please support these families who simply want to continue living in the city.

Our families are advocating for a budget that includes:

- \$5 million to expand the ARISE guaranteed income pilot program for two more years and help 600 new families who earn 50% of the area median income and below. ARISE is set to end in June of this year, but our families need this program.
- \$10 million to create a locally funded voucher program to support families who earn 40% of the area median income (AMI) and below
- Funding to expand the city's current pilot rental assistance subsidy program, which supports the economic stabilization of working class families.

Even though the city is proposing \$30 million dollars for housing in the 2026 Budget, this funding will not benefit families at the lowest income at this moment, and that leaves our community behind. Why are there no increases in housing programs, and only for development. We need stronger action on housing, as outlined previously. According to Princeton's Eviction Lab, Alexandria has the highest eviction rate compared to Fairfax and Arlington.

Don't keep ignoring our families that have lived here many years. Housing is a human right, and they also deserve to be a priority. The 2026 budget should reflect that.

Thank you,

11
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Good Morning Mayor, Vice Mayor and City Council Members,

My name is Maura. I have lived in Alexandria for 18 years and currently work as a cook in a restaurant. I also have a son that is currently attending Alexandria City High School

I'm here today, like many of my neighbors and friends who have shown up for several years, to reiterate once again how the city's residents continue to be affected by the high cost of rent and the lack of affordable housing. This situation especially impacts families like mine, whose annual income is less than \$50,000. You already know this from the many times you've come to our community to hear our stories.

Wages aren't rising at the same rate as rents are rising, and due to these large rent increases and low wages, I've sometimes found myself in situations where I have to borrow money to pay the rent, since my work hours are going down but the rent isn't.

For this reason, I ask you all, as our representatives, not to leave us out of the city's priorities. As working people, we deserve to be heard and be taken into consideration. Now more than ever, we need resources. We need local funding to continue the ARISE program and provide opportunities for new families to benefit, as this program creates more stability in our homes.

Thank you.

Buenas dias Alcaldesa, Vice alcaldesa y miembros del consejo,

Mi nombre es Maura, llevo viviendo en la ciudad de Alexandria 18 años, actualmente estoy trabajando de cocinera en un restaurante y tengo un hijo que esta en la high school.

Hoy me presento ante ustedes, al igual que muchos de mis vecinos y conocidos lo han hecho durante varios años, para reiterarles una vez más cómo los residentes de la ciudad, continuamos siendo afectados por el alto costo de las rentas y la falta de vivienda asequible. Esta situación impacta especialmente a familias como la mía, cuyos ingresos anuales son inferiores a 50 mil dólares. Cosa que ustedes ya saben debido a las veces que han venido a nuestra comunidad a escuchar nuestros testimonios.

Los salarios no suben al mismo ritmo que están subiendo las rentas, y debido a estos grandes incrementos de renta y a los pocos salarios a veces me e visto en situaciones donde tengo que prestar dinero para poder pagar la renta, ya que las horas en el trabajo bajan pero el precio de los alquileres no.

Por este motivo les pido que como nuestros representantes no nos sigan dejando fuera de las prioridades de la ciudad, como clase trabajadora merecemos ser escuchados y ser tomados en cuenta. Hoy más que nunca, necesitamos recursos. Necesitamos que pongan fondos locales para seguir el programa de los \$500 dólares y darle oportunidades a nuevas familias que benefician, ya que este programa crea más estabilidad en nuestros hogares.

Gracias.

Jonathan Krall

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Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Council,

I am Jonathan Krall. I've been living in Alexandria for 20 years. I am a member of Grassroots Alexandria.

I am speaking in favor continuing the ARISE guaranteed income pilot program, for housing supports, and for support of the DASH bus system.

In all cases, these are investments in our community. For the ARISE program, I know that studies show that money given to poor people supports housing stability and local spending.

In the case of housing, studies show that housing-first programs are very cost effective. Housing instability is expensive. In America, our housing of last report is our very expensive prison system. To the degree that we can re-balance investments away from prisons and towards housing, we come out ahead economically.

In the case of the DASH bus, a study by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission found that Alexandria's public transit system supports 37,000 jobs and generates \$180 million each year in personal income and sales tax revenues of which \$64 million is attributed to DASH. Not all of that \$64 million comes back to Alexandria, but it greatly exceeds the \$35 million DASH operating budget.

Finally, I'll mention that every study everywhere shows that, even more so than the bus, bike lanes generate net revenue. If we ever built an actual working, connected bike network in some portion of our city, we could realize those benefits.

Thank you.

Jonathan Krall
Alexandria, VA

Mayor Gaskins, Vice Mayor Bagley, and members of City Council,

My name is Jim Durham. I live on Fort Williams Pkwy in Alexandria. I am speaking as a member of Grassroots Alexandria in support of greater access to Alexandria's DASH bus system, particularly for people living with low income, and for the economic, health, and safety benefits for ALL Alexandrians.

First, I would like to thank the Manager for proposing a budget that fully funds DASH current services. DASH is both a critically important mobility option **and a necessary investment in Alexandria's economic health**. A recent study showed a 160% return on investment for every dollar invested in Northern Virginia transit. 160 percent

For greater access to DASH, I invite your attention to the situation on Line 32, where off-peak and weekend DASH service is once per hour. That is once per hour from the Landmark Transit Center and the high rise apartments along the Holmes Run Pkwy to businesses along South Pickett Street, to the Van Dorn metro station, and to and from residences in the Eisenhower Valley. Once per hour – every 60 minutes -**That is not a very useful service.**

Line 32 was designed to serve high-density residential and job areas with high-frequency service to enable people to choose taking the bus as their preferred option and in many cases, their only option. The section of Line 32 between Landmark and the Van Dorn metro station **serves a population with a 33% greater percentage of people living with low income than the Alexandria average. 33**

Investing in bus service is also investing in traffic safety. Public transportation is **ten times safer** per mile than traveling by car with **less than a tenth the per-mile injury or death rates** as automobile travel.

In closing, The 2019 Alexandria Transit Vision Plan set an expectation of frequent, i.e., 15-minute all-day service for Line 32 by 2022. If that can be achieved in this budget cycle, great. If not, at least provide funds to increase frequency on Line 32 from every 60 minutes to 30 minutes off-peak and weekends...**for the equity benefits and,... for the economic, public health and traffic safety benefits for all Aleandrians**

Thank you.

