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JUSTICE CENTER**



**Tenants and
Workers United**

March 13, 2023

Sent via email:

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Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, alyia.gaskins@alexandriava.gov
Councilman R. Kirk McPike, kirk.mcpike@alexandriava.gov

Re: Deeply Affordable Housing in the Alexandria FY 2024 Budget

Dear City Manager, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Council Members,

We are writing this letter as a coalition of local community organizations that have deep relationships with low-income communities of color across Alexandria City. We applaud the City Council for naming Affordable Housing as a priority for this budget. In that light, we urge the City Council to increase funding for committed deeply affordable housing.

We consistently hear from our community members that deeply affordable housing is their most urgent need. Working class families are struggling to recover from the pandemic and dig themselves out of the resulting debt but face an impossible choice: pay increasing rents or leave their homes and communities. Right now, the City has a window to preserve deeply affordable housing before increasing development pressures push out Alexandria's diverse communities of color.

We urge you to support the following changes to the FY 2024 budget:

- Develop a City-funded voucher program that will provide an ongoing housing subsidy for people who earn less than 60% AMI. We ask that the City invest \$5 million into this program for FY 2024.
- Increase financial support for development projects that have units at 60% AMI and below.
- Provide adequate funding for Community Engagement for the Alexandria West Small Area Plan process.
- Significantly increase Rental Assistance funding to ensure there are funds for families who are at risk of eviction.

We have also noted that the City plans to develop additional Committed Affordable Units (CAUs). We ask that the City make sure there is adequate diversity in the units made available so

that community members in need are not limited to choosing solely from one bedrooms and studio apartments.

We hope you can take into consideration our recommendations in this critical housing situation across the City of Alexandria.

Sincerely,

Bert Bayou
DC/MD/VA Chapter Director, African Communities Together

Ingris Moran
Lead Organizer, Tenants and Workers United

Larisa Zehr
Attorney, Legal Aid Justice Center

Public Comments from David Lagos

3/13/2023

Budget Public Hearing

Dear Mayor, vice mayor and city council members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is David Lagos, and I am a current 7th grader at George Washington Middle School. I have been participating in Tenants and Workers United's youth group, Alexandria United Teens, for the past year. I am here today to express my concerns as a student when it comes to the lack of investment for resources for students and the role that you as city council have to influence when making final decisions on our education.

As students, we should be able to have more mental health supports both inside and outside of schools. Unfortunately, our school system is not placing enough school psychologists into the middle schools for FY 2024, and we see that this is where most of the incidents are happening. As students, we have been constantly sharing our concerns but are not being heard on what would help meet our needs. As city council, you all have the opportunity in the budget to place more resources in the community that are accessible to students, as well as have an influence on how our school system decides to spend the funds. These would make a difference in the lives of students and help with the overall success and wellness of students.

As you are continuing to go further into the budget process, I hope you are able to make this a priority. As students, we are looking up to you as leaders to do something that would truly impact our wellbeing and hold accountability on what's being put in place for students.

Public Comments from Nathaly Zelaya, Tenants and Workers United

3/13/2023

Budget Public Hearing

Dear City Manager, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Council Members,

My name is Nathaly Zelaya, community organizer at Tenants and Workers United. As a grassroots organization, deeply rooted in the Alexandria community for over 35 years, we have seen how our low-income families of color have been burdened by many issues. The high costs of rent and the lack of enough affordable housing is the #1 issue.

We are seeing a lot of housing developments all across the city, but very few units for families earning 40% of the area median income (AMI) and below.

This is why we are here today for you to prioritize Alexandria's low-income communities of color in the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget. The budget is a clear expression of the values and priorities of the City, and we hope our community needs will be reflected as a priority.

We ask the Council to prioritize targeted investments such as:

- City vouchers, at least \$5 million should be invested into creating this voucher program for the upcoming 2024 budget for families who earn less than the 40% of the AMI.
- We want the city to invest in development projects that will create units at 60% of the AMI and below.
- The City provide adequate funding for Community Engagement for the Alexandria West Small Area Plan process.
- Lastly, significantly increase funding for rental assistance to ensure there are funds for families who are at risk to be evicted.

The City says affordable housing is a priority, then act on it. Let that be reflected in this budget.

Let's not forget the All Alexandria Resolution 2974, where it states, "reduce and eliminate racial and social inequities in the allocation of City resources through the use of a budget equity tool which may entail the adjustment of budgets and funding reallocation."

If we want to have an equitable city that provides opportunities for everyone, including the working class and people of color, then you, as leaders, must take bold action.

Remember, your decision-making is what will show us if you are taking the right steps to ensure equity in the city, or if you are continuing to leave our community behind.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

Public Comments from Sindy Carballo, Tenants and Workers United

3/13/2023

Budget Public Hearing

Dear Mayor, vice mayor and city council members,

My name is Sindy, youth organizer with Tenants and Workers United. I am also an ACPS alumni grad. For the past few years, young people have been leading advocacy efforts demanding more investments of holistic support in their schools rather than punitive measures that disproportionately affect students of color and pushes them further in the school to prison pipeline.

We are here today to express our concerns on the lack of enough actions we've seen across city leaders. As City Council, part of your responsibility is also to provide adequate resources to all young people in the City.

We understand your role as city council and know you have the final say on ACPS' budget as well as ensuring all ACPS students are receiving and benefiting from counseling services, mental health supports, positive behavioral interventions, restorative and transformative justice programs, and other methods that create holistically beneficial learning environments for young people.

We continue to see ACPS invest more of the opposite; funding on surveillance, metal detectors, and security, yet putting nominal funding on proactive solutions, such as Restorative Practices and much more trained equipped staff that supports the wellbeing of our ACPS students.

In the past Safety Report from ACPS, there were less incidents than the previous two quarters. Some alarming data points include 100% of the middle school arrests being made up from only black and Latino students, while 60% of all arrests in the middle and high school levels were black males.

Recognizing this data, why isn't the city council developing alternatives that will make sure young people are truly being met socially, emotionally and academically? Especially with our youth of color, where we continue to see those disparities.

We recognize that city council has added some funding into mental health, but it is not enough to meet student needs.

We are in a crisis, our youth are screaming for support. Let's not just react, let's take proper action, please allocate enough funding that will be accessible to our young people and give them the opportunity for a better future.

Thank you for taking the time to hear us out and hope you can take the needs of the young people across the City into consideration in the budget process moving forward.