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Council members,

My Name is Berole Bekele. I am a community organizer with African Communities Together, known as ACT. I have run ACT's Civic engagement program in Virginia through voter registration, census awareness and voter turnout campaigns, bringing together thousands of African Immigrants that have not been taking part in civic life.

During the pandemic, I did the census work at Southern Towers, and met almost all of the 2500 families there, many of whom immigrated from Africa. Subsequently, because ACT provides the opportunity to play a pivotal role in shaping organizing work in Virginia, we built a strong tenant union at Southern towers apartments, where over 400 mostly African Immigrant tenants faced eviction. During my census work there, followed by my organizing work, I listened to a lot of issues the tenants raised. One of them was about the safety of their children.

We know you have a lot going on, from the lingering coronavirus to development happening everywhere, including on Beauregard near Southern towers. We appreciate that.

~~But~~ our simple concern is the basic pedestrian safety of the children in Southern Towers, especially as they walk to school at Francis Hammond. This is in the midst of many tenants suffering eviction threats during the pandemic; others losing their jobs. Their income level doesn't rival the other side of Seminary Road, but their safety concerns do, or should.

We are asking the Council to act as our elected representatives. You often speak about equity in transportation. And you often highlight improving the bus and pedestrian aspects to achieve it. That is all we are asking: a school bus for the utmost safety of our youth. Whether or not you can do that, the same crosswalk warning light systems and pedestrian safety islands are needed at the Kenmore Avenue intersection, just like the city did on Seminary Road a mile east of the Towers. Please have a gate put in the fence right where the pedestrian walkway begins over I-395 so that the children won't have to walk along one of the highest accident rate intersections in Alexandria. And also please place the fence back in the middle of Seminary Road, west of Library lane. Safety should also take into consideration a dangerous decision by a young child, hurrying to get home.

Thank you for your consideration of these safety items.