

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

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Consideration of Increasing Staffing and Legal Resources for Eviction Prevention Activities.

..BODY

ISSUE: Urgent need for eviction prevention and legal services.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council increase the capacity to support households in the eviction process by funding two Service Navigators and two Housing Relocator positions (\$3~~50~~7,000), storage assistance for household belongings (\$50,000), and additional legal services to assist those at risk for eviction (\$100~~50~~,000).

BACKGROUND: In 2020 the City of Alexandria convened the Eviction Prevention Task Force (Task Force), composed of a number of City departments and external community partners, including the Department of Community and Human Services, Office of Housing, Sheriff's Office, City Attorney's Office, Legal Services of Northern Virginia, Tenant and Workers United, African Communities Together, Christ Church and Emergency Financial Providers. The goal of the Task Force is to coordinate resources and outreach to residents at risk of eviction due to financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The housing crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply increased the risk of long-term harm to renter families and individuals, disruptions of the market affordable housing market and the potential for foreclosure and bankruptcy, especially among small property owners.

Following eviction, a person's likelihood of experiencing homelessness increases, mental and physical health are diminished and the probability of obtaining employment declines. Eviction is also linked with respiratory disease, which could increase the risk of complications if COVID-19 is contracted. Instability, like eviction, is particularly damaging to children, who suffer in ways that impact their educational development and well-being.

DISCUSSION: On August 26, 2021, the US Supreme Court invalidated the federal eviction moratorium which had previously halted evictions through October 3, 2021, in locations where there have been surges in COVID-19 and increases in cases of the Delta variant. The City of Alexandria is currently experiencing both. The eviction moratorium has been lifted across the country, including in the City of Alexandria, as of August 27, 2021. The immediacy of this halt in the eviction moratorium has created devastating impacts to some households in our community, with an increase of eviction filings.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020,

- 2,135 residential Unlawful Detainer Summons have been filed (this begins the process)
- 599 (28%) of these cases were found in favor of the landlord and 283 writs of evictions have been issued (this is the final stage of the process).
 - These cases could have been stopped by the CDC moratorium anywhere along the process. With the moratorium lifted, approximately 134 households are believed to be at immediate risk of eviction.
- 1,307 (61%) of these cases were dismissed or non-suited

Since the start of the Task Force in June 2020,

- Legal Services of Northern Virginia has provided legal advice to 1,031 individuals through courthouse outreach, which is continuing.
- The Office of Community Services and the Office of Housing have assisted 3,717 households to successfully apply for, and secure city and state rental assistance.

The overall trends in the data do not indicate that there is an uptick at this time in eviction filings, but rather that there were many households over the past year and a half that started the eviction process but were legally protected by the CDC moratorium. Now that the moratorium has ended, staff anticipates that the pipeline will begin to move again, and the City will experience an increase in residents who need assistance in applying for state rental assistance and to find new housing, and who will require other resources.

In order to have the capacity to support those facing eviction and to mitigate the trauma and loss resulting from eviction, the Eviction Prevention Task Force recommends adding two Service Navigators and two Housing Relocator positions and funding for storage assistance and additional legal resources to be provided by the Legal Aid Justice Center.

Services Navigators will provide support through outreach including, but not limited to, door-to-door knocking contacts, community events, and onsite outreach at properties identified as having higher rates of evicting tenants. The Service Navigators will support the completion and submission of additional Rent Relief Program applications and/or identify other resources to keep tenants stably housed. Housing Relocators will help residents displaced in the eviction

process to secure stable housing. Housing location is a specialized service and is not currently available specifically within the community, except at the emergency shelters. The positions will be bilingual and located in the Office of Community Services, the Office of Housing, and at ALIVE!. The additional legal resources would be for residents who are in the eviction process and ineligible due to federal restrictions for representation by Legal Services for Northern Virginia. Subsequent to a City Council approval of funding, the City will enter into an agreement with ALIVE! and the Legal Aid Justice Center for the planned services. Storage services will include transportation to move household goods in the case of an eviction and three months of financial assistance for a storage unit.

FISCAL IMPACT: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in the amount of \$407,000 from the previously allocated ARPA bridge funding for housing and food needs (for which alternative sources of funding have been identified) will be used to cover estimated costs for the next 12 months (\$357,000 for City staffing plus eviction storage costs plus Legal Aid Justice Center ~~\$100,000~~~~60,000~~). Staff project the need for approximately an additional \$500,000 for eviction related support in ARPA tranche 2, which will be proposed for allocation as part of the FY 2023 budget process.

ITEM	Cost
2 FTE Housing Relocators (Grade 15, including benefits)	\$146,000
2 Service Navigators (Grade 17, including benefits)	\$161,000
Eviction Storage	\$50,000
Eviction legal support provided by the Legal Aid Justice Center <u>for one year</u>	\$100,000 50,000
Continued eviction related support (ARPA tranche 2)	\$500,000 (est.)

This amount for legal services has been raised from \$50,000 to \$100,000 as a result of further communication between DCHS and the Legal Aid Justice Center. This \$100,000 amount will fund the hiring of a full-time attorney for a twelve-month period.

ATTACHMENT: None

STAFF:

Dana Wedeles, Special Assistant to the City Manager
Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager
Kate Garvey, Director, Department of Community and Human Services
Helen McIlvaine, Director, Office of Housing
Lesla Gilbert, Economic Support Director, Department of Community and Human Services