



Legislation Details (With Text)

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 20, 2016
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:
Federal Issues for Discussion with Congressman Don Beyer.

ISSUE: Federal issues for discussion with Congressman Don Beyer.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive this report.

DISCUSSION: Periodically, Council meets with members of its Congressional delegation and shares with them its thoughts on federal issues of concern to the City. Council as a body will be meeting with Congressman Don Beyer, for the first time on April 26. Congressman Beyer has now been in office since January 2015. Prior to his service in Congress, Beyer served as Lieutenant Governor of Virginia and as Ambassador to Switzerland and Lichtenstein.

Below is a discussion of some federal issues to bring to the Congressman's attention. Most of these issues focus on the federal budget, where reductions in federal discretionary domestic spending is having a materially

negative impact on local government service delivery in areas that have long been a purview of the federal government.

HOUSING ISSUES. Alexandria has a number of residents who are dependent on the federal government for financial assistance for their housing needs. This assistance is generally provided to the City, which then passes it on to those eligible for such assistance.

Alexandria currently uses federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds (\$0.8 million per year) from the Department of Housing and Community Development to fully or partially fund a number of City programs: the Home Rehabilitation Loan program, RAMP (the Rental Accessibility Modification Program, which helps low and moderate income renters who have physical disabilities make accessibility modifications to their residences), Fair Housing Testing, the Winter Shelter for the Homeless, and Transitional Assistance. CDBG funding is also used to pay some of the Office of Housing's administrative costs to run these programs.

Federal Home Investment Partnership (HOME) monies (\$ 0.4 million per year) support the Housing Opportunities Fund (used to purchase, renovate, and preserve affordable housing) and Office of Housing program administration.

Past federal budget cuts have resulted in major reductions to the City's homeownership programs which received significant funding from both HOME and CDBG programs. Currently the homeownership programs operate only on income from the repayment of past loans, and with minimal staffing.

The National Community Development Association (NCDA) is a national nonprofit organization comprised of more than 300 local governments across the country that administer federally-supported community and economic development, housing and human service programs) recommends that both CDBG and HOME appropriations be funded at following levels: \$3.3 billion for CDBG for CDBG formula grants (\$3.0 billion currently) and \$1.2 billion for HOME formula grants (\$.95 billion currently). The City believes that CDBG and HOME funds are needed more than ever to provide a lifeline to the elderly, victims of domestic violence, local food banks, the homeless, the disabled, youth, small businesses, and veterans. These funds are a critical component of the City's resources to develop and rehabilitate housing that serves low income households.

The City supports recent proposals in the President's Budget to make the HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program function better and improve program performance. The budget proposes the elimination of some current administrative requirements that will give jurisdictions like Alexandria greater flexibility in administering the funds to achieve the greatest impact and draw down other scarce local and federal funding resources.

Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA). Federal funds for housing are also provided directly to the City's Housing Authority, ARHA. The City supports increased federal funding in the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget for Public Housing Operating and Capital funds along with the Housing Choice Voucher program (often referred to as Section 8), which provide critical housing options for Alexandria residents. Funding in these areas have been subject to ongoing reductions for many years.

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES. The City of Alexandria is heavily dependent on mass transit to move residents and visitors around the City, as well as around the region. The City is a major participant in the Metro system; we have our own City bus system-DASH; we initiated a free trolley in Old Town several years ago; and we launched the region's first Bus Rapid Transit system in dedicated lanes along Route 1, which connects to Arlington County's system opening this spring. In order to provide greater transit opportunities, Alexandria is undertaking two major transit projects in the near future.

First, the City plans to begin construction of a new Metro transit station to serve the residents and businesses of the Potomac Yard area. To help fund this, the City will be applying later this month for a \$20 million grant as part of the U.S. Department of Transportation's FY 2016 TIGER program, as well as a TIFIA loan of up to \$88 million to assist with the construction of the station (The TIFIA [Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act] program provides Federal credit assistance in the form of low-interest direct loans, loan guarantees, and standby lines of credit to finance surface transportation projects of national and regional significance). This new station will be a critical piece of infrastructure for the City and for the region, and a TIGER grant and TIFIA loan would help the City finance this major construction project. The Potomac Yard station will be a key part of the Metrorail system that serves hundreds of thousands of riders every day and is vital to the continued economic competitiveness of Northern Virginia.

The second project that the City plans to initiate in the near future (FY 2017) is the West End Transitway, another Bus Rapid Transit route. The West End Transitway is a regionally significant transit project connecting the City of Alexandria's west end neighborhoods to the Pentagon and the Van Dorn Metro Station. Project funding includes various regional, state federal and private sector contributions. The project will apply to the Federal Transit Administration Capital improvement grant program (Small Starts) for approximately \$50 to 80 million in calendar year 2017. The Small Starts funding will be paramount to the timely completion of the West End Transitway.

The City will contact Congressman Beyer's staff seeking letters of support if they would be appropriate for either of these projects.

HOMELAND SECURITY ISSUES. Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the federal government, the states, and localities have worked together to lessen the possibility of, and prepare to respond to, any future acts of terrorism.

One of the things that the federal government has done is provide grants to local police, fire, and sheriff's departments so that they can train their staffs, purchase equipment, and otherwise prepare for acts of terrorism. The State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) have helped Alexandria's Fire Department, Police Department and Sheriff's Office. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program (including the SAFER fire staffing and response grant and the Fire Prevention and Safety grant) helps fire departments nationwide improve their baseline emergency response capability.

The Homeland Security and UASI grants have helped Alexandria develop capabilities for responding to terrorist attacks. In the National Capital Region (NCR), UASI funds have been used to help the area prepare for a future mass casualty incident. The NCR (including the Alexandria Fire Department) used its funds to purchase and outfit eight Medical Ambulance Buses and Mass Casualty units, which can each transport 40 patients and treat up to 100 patients. In addition, learning from the lessons of the response to the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, the NCR also used UASI funds to develop a patient tracking system. The UASI program completely funds our emergency response (city-wide) training and exercise program, planning and National Incident Management System training positions. Alexandria and the region have benefited from these programs immensely.

The Federal FY 2017 budget proposal drastically reduces many of these grants. The Homeland Security Grant Program would be cut by more than half, to \$267 million, and the UASI grants would be reduced by 45% to \$330 million (both of these are nationwide appropriations). The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) program provides funding to address the unique needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and assists these localities in building sustainable capacity to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from acts

of terrorism. The President's Fiscal Year 2017 budget proposed a national UASI funding level of only \$330 million, an almost 50 percent cut from the \$600 million in Fiscal Year 2016. The D.C. region receives about \$54 million in UASI funding.

In addition, the AFG and SAFER grant programs would be cut by \$10 million each and be classified as terrorism preparedness grants with a priority given to applications that "enhance capabilities for terrorism response and other major incidents." This will virtually eliminate the AFD from pursuing these grants for anything other than terrorism response.

The City would appreciate any efforts the Congressman can make to preserve adequate funding for these emergency response programs.

HEALTH ISSUES. The City would like to bring three health issues with federal implications to Congressman Beyer's attention.

Zika Virus. Earlier this year, City staff contacted the Congressman's staff and asked if they could bring to the attention of the National Park Service (NPS) the potential need to initiate mosquito control programs on NPS land in, and adjacent to, the City (including wetlands, which are very hospitable to mosquitoes and excellent breeding grounds for them), given recent concerns about the Zika virus. Mr. Beyer's staff did contact the NPS and was told they were aware of the potential need to address Zika issues. For NPS, which has 411 parks and other areas covering 84 million acres, this is a national policy issue. At that time, there was some thought that the virus might be confined to regions farther south than Northern Virginia.

Recent press reports indicate that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending sustained mosquito control throughout the entire country. Given this recommendation, the City asks the Congressman and his staff to continue to press NPS to initiate mosquito control programs on their land in, and adjacent to, the City.

Funding for Public Health Emergency Preparedness. The CDC provides funds to the states to ensure that state and local public health providers are prepared to respond to various public health emergencies. The vehicle for this funding is the CDC's Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program. Last month, the CDC announced that it was reducing these funds nationwide by about 7 percent in FY 2017. Virginia's reduction is slightly higher; rather than receiving \$15.1 million, as had been previously announced by CDC, it will get \$13.9 million. The funds that are being reduced nationwide are being reprogrammed to support Zika response efforts.

While it is necessary to do everything possible with regard to the Zika virus, it is important to make sure that fund transfers such as this do not harm other public health emergency response programs. We ask that Congressman Beyer support efforts to provide supplemental funds-not PHEP funds-for Zika response programs.

Title X Family Planning Funds. For some years now, the City has sponsored programs to prevent teen pregnancy. The City has a Teen Wellness Center at T.C. Williams High School, and has offered additional family planning programs at other facilities in the City. Federal funds have been used to pay for public health staff, as well as family planning pharmaceuticals, including long-acting reversible contraceptives (these are known to be the most effective products to prevent teen pregnancies).

Federal funding for this program is no longer reliable. The Virginia Health Department has notified local health departments that Title X Family Planning Funding is being reduced in the grant year that is just now beginning. Alexandria's Health Department expects to lose over \$165,000 for this grant year.

If we are to prevent teen pregnancy, programs like this are crucial, and funding for them must be consistent from year to year. We would appreciate any efforts that Congressman Beyer can make to increase funding for Title X Family Planning, and to ensure that it is adequately funded on a regular basis.

STAFF:

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