



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 19, 2021

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration and Approval of Funding to Support Ongoing COVID-19 Eviction Prevention Response.

ISSUE: Consideration and approval of an advance allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funding for Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV) to hire a second housing justice attorney and data analyst position to support ongoing COVID-19 Eviction Prevention analysis and planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council:

- (1) Approve LSNV's request for funding to hire a second Housing Justice Attorney to provide individual representation for City residents facing eviction and increase the organization's capacity to address the City's eviction crisis;
- (2) Authorize the creation of a Data Management Position to support the data collection and analysis needs of the Eviction Prevention Task Force; and
- (3) Approve an ordinance allocation of \$200,000 from the City's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding to fund this request.

BACKGROUND: As articulated at a City Council work session on May 22, the Eviction Prevention Task Force (EPTF) is a collaborative effort that has been focused on responding to the eviction crisis throughout the COVID 19 public health emergency. Two key elements of the success of the work of the EPTF has been court outreach and legal support from Legal Services of Northern Virginia, as well as the use of data to understand the prevalence of eviction. The data has also made it possible to effectively pinpoint the efforts of intervention and enrollment in the rental assistance programs offered by the state and the City.

LSNV established a court outreach program that has assisted approximately 843 City residents between July 1, 2020 and April 30, 2021. LSNV also developed a robust eviction and writ data sharing process, providing data weekly to support community partners and local government agencies in targeting their assistance to those at most imminent risk of eviction. In coordination with ALIVE! and other community partners, LSNV worked to develop targeted outreach approaches focused on identified high-risk zip codes and properties, aiming to inform tenants of legal rights and opportunities for rental assistance. Based on the volume of and increasing complexity of the work to continue to effectively prevent evictions, additional resources are needed for legal assistance and data management and analysis support.

During the May 11 worksession, the Eviction Prevention Task Force shared the targeted outreach approaches and the amount of State and local rental assistance funds expended to date to prevent the eviction of over 5000 households for the period covering March 2020 to April 2021. The Task Force also shared a list of key action steps and recommendations that would enable a multi-pronged and holistic approach to eviction prevention and housing stability. This approach is flexible enough to adapt to individuals by focusing on the delivery of targeted, data-driven eviction diversion and intervention services. An additional Housing Justice Attorney will enable LSNV to implement this multi-pronged approach more fully, as well as increase capacity to provide individual client representation to safeguard the rights of tenants facing eviction.

A Data Management position would make it possible to relieve some of the burden on current EPTF members and will use existing and create new systems that provide and analyze data so that the EPTF and other organizations may intervene, as well as prevent housing insecurity. The position would produce data analytics that would inform the priorities of the Task Force and support the development of longer-term prevention strategies linked to the systems of care and other stabilization efforts.

Although the planned first allocation of federal ARPA funds is not scheduled for City Council consideration until July 6, given the number of possible evictions and the urgent nature of the eviction process, funding to bolster the staffing of the eviction prevention process is recommended to be approved at this time.

FISCAL IMPACT: LSNV projects the annual costs for another staff attorney at LSNV dedicated to housing justice would cost \$88,357. The cost for the Management Data Analyst in the City's Office of Performance Analytics would be \$111,643. The total cost of these efforts will be \$200,000. The funding would be for one year with an extension possible, if there remains a large number of eviction proceedings in process in FY 2023.

STAFF:

Debra R. Collins, Deputy City Manager

Kate Garvey, Director, Department of Community and Human Services, (DCHS)

Lesa Gilbert, Director, Center for Economic Support, (DCHS)