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# Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Budget Public Hearing, Wednesday, April 23, 2025

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**[00:00:04]** Welcome, everyone, to our second day of budget public hearings, Wednesday, April 23rd, 2025. And again, this is one of three nights of public hearings on the FY2026 advertised budget plan, the advertised capital improvement program for fiscal years 26 to 2030, and the FY2025 third quarter review.

**[00:00:27]** During this public hearing, we'll also accept testimony on the FY2026 effective tax rate and other tax rates. And just as a reminder for everyone, for public hearing testimony, you're given three minutes to speak as an individual. If you're a spokesperson for a group, you are given five minutes.

**[00:00:44]** We do have a lengthy speakers list tonight. I do have 119 speakers to hear from tonight, so I'd ask folks to be conscious of that. And when the red light comes on, please try to abide by that. And in addition, just as a reminder, this is a public hearing and not a rally.

**[00:01:03]** I appreciate folks' enthusiasm, but every minute that we take with that potentially is a minute someone down the stream, we're going to be here very late tonight, won't get a chance to testify. And so if we could all be mindful of that, I would certainly appreciate that, as would the board and the speakers who will be here until very late tonight.

**[00:01:23]** And with that, and one last reminder, if you're here tonight and you have not signed up to testify. We are accepting testimony from folks who have not signed up tomorrow at the end of the public

hearing tomorrow. And so if you're here today and you have not signed up and wish to testify, I'm going to need you to sign up and come back for the public hearing tomorrow afternoon as well. And with that, I am going to go ahead and call our first speaker today, and that is Steve Monahan, the Fairfax County Chapter President of the Southern States PBA. And I know that Steve

[00:01:58] has been called away. This happens in this line of work all too often. And so I just want to acknowledge that everyone at the dais has a written copy of the testimony that he was going to provide today for us to review. And of course, if we have any questions about it, to reach out directly to Steve and the PBA. And so with that, I'm going to go to speaker number two, who is James Sadler. Speaker number three is Kerry Wilson, and speaker number four is Andy Lacker. And if we called your name, please make sure you're down here close to testify. We don't

[00:02:34] want anyone stumbling down the steps to get to the podium. And so is James Sadler here? James Sadler is not here. Do we have Kerry Wilson? Not seen Kerry. This is not Kerry Wilson, but But welcome, Rip.

[00:02:55] So you are testifying on behalf of Kerry Wilson. Well, on behalf of the AHAC. Excellent. So you are speaker number three, and you, of course, are? Mr. Chairman, my name is Rip Sullivan. I am a citizen of Fairfax, a resident of Drainsville, and a proud member of the Virginia General Assembly.

[00:03:16] Excellent. Welcome to the board. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Affordable Housing Advisory Council. And allow me, if I might, just a moment to add my personal thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, and to my supervisor, Jimmy Bierman, and to the entire board for allowing me to continue to serve as the co-chair of this remarkable council, along with the incomparable Carrie Wilson.

[00:03:42] She is my co-chair, and I'm sorry to disappoint. But something tells me you might hear from her or certainly other people working with her later on. I have to say that AHAC's volunteer members and the county staff who support our work are all deeply committed public servants doing outstanding work to help Fairfax County become better and better.

[00:04:04] AHAC is grateful, Mr. Chairman, for the board's longstanding commitment to affordable housing, and we applaud your leadership in advancing a bold, transformative agenda that has already yielded 4,000 affordable homes toward the county's 10,000-unit goal by 2034. Meeting this goal for housing production and preservation requires a consistent and renewable funding source.

[00:04:25] The goal of two cents on the property tax rate by fiscal year 2027 as the new baseline investment to meet the affordable housing development and preservation goals adopted by this board remains absolutely critical. Today, I want to focus on a few key recommendations that AHAC believes are essential to maintaining our momentum.

[00:04:42] First, we urge the Board to adopt the proposed quarter-penny increase, or roughly $8.47 million, in the FY2026 budget. These resources are urgently needed to keep pace with the growing demand for affordable homes, to support shovel-ready projects like Innovation Station, East County, Chantilly Library, and Stone Road Park and Ride sites, and to seize timely preservation opportunities such as Stonegate Village and the Crescent Apartments redevelopment.

[00:05:10] While this increase brings baseline funding to $42.44 million, we still face a $25 million annual shortfall to fully realize the 10,000-unit goal. Therefore, we encourage continued use of quarterly reviews

and one-time funds to close this gap until we can establish a reliable baseline equivalent to two pennies on the tax rate by fiscal year 2027.

[00:05:36] Second, AHAC strongly supports the exploration and adoption of new revenue options, such as a meals tax. This could provide a stable and more flexible revenue stream, critical for meeting both housing and human service needs without over-relying on real estate taxes.

[00:05:51] Third, Mr. Chairman, as affordable housing is about much more than just bricks and mortar, we urge the Board to prioritize wraparound supports like child care and social services. These services are essential to the long-term success of residents and should be part of early planning for each housing development with resources identified in future budgets.

[00:06:12] Fourth, we are looking forward to seeing the Board of Education and Services. We ask that the board direct staff to use existing state authority to develop strategies that mitigate development costs and incentivize affordable housing production. This could include reducing fees, expediting permits, or offering density bonuses, each of which can unlock significant value without major fiscal impact.

[00:06:31] In closing, Mr. Chairman, we understand the economic uncertainty ahead and the competing priorities that you must balance. But we also know that housing is foundational for workforce stability, educational opportunity, and economic resilience.

[00:06:47] Continuing this strategic investment, even during challenging times, is not only the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing to do. In our written statement, Mr. Chair, which has been provided to you, we also have provided more detail on housing need and the impact of your investments.

[00:07:03] Thank you again for your leadership and for your commitment to ensuring that Fairfax County remains a community where everyone can thrive. Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the board. Thank you very much, Rip. Thank you for your leadership in the General Assembly, and also thank all the folks at AHAC for excellent testimony.

[00:07:20] Appreciate it. It's a hard-working group. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is. Thank you. Speaker number four is Andy Lacker, to be followed by Alexandra Stewart and David Edelman. If I called your name, if you can come down close and be ready to testify, welcome, Andy. Hey, thank you.

[00:07:37] Good afternoon, Chairman McKay, supervisors, and county staff. My name is Andy Latcher. I'm a 39-year resident of Fairfax County and I'm the board chair of Cornerstones, a non-profit rooted in the county for 55 years. Cornerstones serves our neighbors struggling with homelessness, food insecurity, and the lack of affordable housing. Numbers tell a sobering story. The point-in-time count shows 23% increase in homelessness since the pandemic.

[00:08:06] According to the Capital Area Food Bank, 27% of households in this county experienced food and security in 2024. We have seen double-digit increases in housing costs, pushing out the very workers who keep Fairfax County thriving. As the federal government operations are restructured, our county is facing inconceivable transformations, putting our region's workforce and overall economy at risk. Now even more families will just be a missed paycheck away from economic crisis.

[00:08:36] We commend the county's efforts to prioritize human services in its FY26 budget. We fully support efforts by the Board to pursue new, sustainable, and diversified sources of revenue, including a 4%

meals tax and a 2% increase in the transit occupancy tax to help fill budgetary gaps, while continuing to leverage property tax as a major revenue source.

[00:09:02] We need these diversified revenue sources to accomplish the following four human services goals. One, address the affordable housing crisis. We need greater investment in the preservation and development of affordable and workforce housing, as well as expanded rental assistance to keep people housed.

[00:09:22] Congratulations on breaking ground on the residents at Government Center. Two, while major initiatives like this take time, the only long-term solution for a housing crisis is more affordable and workforce housing, as well as permanent supportive housing for those with chronic housing challenges.

[00:09:40] We applaud the additional quarter penny proposed for affordable housing. helping us move closer to the resources needed to reach the Board's goal of 10,000 new affordable homes in 2034. And we concur with the recommendations laid out by Rip Sullivan from AHAC.

[00:09:57] Two, support your nonprofit partners. Fairfax County's human service nonprofits are essential extensions of county services. We urge the Board to include equitable costs of living adjustments for our sector, recognizing that the same inflationary pressures that affect county employees also impact NGO frontline service providers.

[00:10:21] Three, protect our most vulnerable. Homeless individuals and families rely on crisis response shelter and wraparound services just to survive. The current system is under significant strain. The new Fair Ridge Family Shelter allowed the conversion of space previously used for families at Emory Rucker, adding 46 new beds for single individuals, this is a great step forward, and thank you.

[00:10:48] Unfortunately, there are many more people in Reston and countywide who were being served in winter overflow programs and the temporary shelter that are now closed and have no other options. Until new permanent supportive housing investments are ready for our occupancy, we must continue to provide resources to address the most basic needs and dignity of people so that no one is left behind and no one is sleeping in tents.

[00:11:15] And fourth, protect our communities. The county's Opportunity Neighborhoods Program is an essential tool in engaging all members of our community. I know Supervisors Beerman and Alcorn have been able to regularly engage with these neighborhood ambassadors to hear firsthand about community concerns.

[00:11:34] You'll hear directly from them during these hearings and I've appended some of their stories to my written testimony. I'm proud to call Fairfax County my home and I'm proud of the programs and services that this county provides to those who need help. Let's invest for the longer term in housing construction, but let's also ensure that we provide resources for programs and services addressing people who are in current crisis.

[00:11:58] Let's ensure that Fairfax, consistent with the goals of one Fairfax, remains a place where all can live with dignity and opportunity. Thank you for your time, your service to our community, and for your leadership. Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Alexandra Stewart.

[00:12:17] Is Alexandra Stewart here? Alexandra Stewart, speaker number five. Speaker number six, David Edelman, is here, to be followed by speaker number seven, Keith Merlin, speaker number eight,

Kathy Cole. Welcome.

[00:12:40] Welcome. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished board of the supervisors and Mr. Hill and his staff. I'm David Edelman. I'm speaking on behalf of Investing Fairfax. It's a coalition of grassroots organizations that advocates for county services.

[00:13:02] We have members of the PTA, small businesses, faith leaders, the NAACP, and many county and school employees in our coalition. I want to acknowledge that these are difficult economic times this year, that we don't yet know the impact of DOGE and all the cuts that are coming to our county, and we do not know what the end result of all these economic changes are.

[00:13:35] So I commend the work of the county executive and his staff in trying to thread the needle and balance this budget. We have many residents that were at one point gainfully employed that might find themselves soon not.

[00:13:53] Some of these, by the way, are my friends and neighbors. I know friends and neighbors that have been laid off at the federal level. And I can only assume that this is going to mean harder economic times for Fairfax County. So our first suggestion in preparing for these times is implementing the prepared food and meals tax, formerly known as the meals tax, to bring in more revenue because I believe we will need this.

[00:14:19] Because one of the problems of a downturn in the economy is that our citizens need the services more when the economy is bad than when it is good, but we find ourselves without revenue.

[00:14:35] So the meals tax is already implemented by several different jurisdictions around us. It diversifies our revenue stream. It collects funds from non-residents of the county.

[00:14:51] And it is one of the few remaining revenue streams allowed to us by the state that we have not tapped into. We recommend that you implement the full 4% because we will need these funds.

[00:15:09] The implementation plan allows for restaurants to retain some money in order to adjust to this new tax, and I think that's prudent. I did have the benefit of listening to people speak yesterday, before I came today, many of them opposing taxes.

[00:15:31] And after years of talking about the budget, I would say that any serious discussion of lowing taxes is a serious discussion of reducing services and reducing line items.

[00:15:49] The county executive has already done a great job of trying to find some savings, so I would like my fellow citizens, when they come up and they don't want taxes, to tell us what they're willing to see eliminated. I also believe that we should honor the collective bargaining agreements that we have with all our county employees and our teachers.

[00:16:12] We should continue to compensate in a way that is allowed, to retain good staff, and there may be a way that I believe that I see to fund the collective bargaining, the collective bargaining agreement with teachers by increasing the transfer, having only the members of the collective bargaining unit be given the raise, excluding those who are not in the collective bargaining. And then I think the schools are going to have to find some reductions in the same way

[00:16:45] the county has. And in that way, I think we can keep our promise. So in FY 2027, we're only in 2026. I see that there's going to be some serious need for budget prioritization. Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Keith Merlin. Keith is here to be followed by Kathy Cole and Lucy Biednell. If I called your

name, you will be next in that order. Welcome, Keith. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay, members of the board, I'm Keith Merlin, president of the Washington

[00:17:23] Airports Task Force. The Washington Airports Task Force respectfully requests a continuation of Fairfax County's grant to support our work in 2026. As a non-profit, non-partisan 501c3 corporation, we're focused on the passenger growth, cargo growth, and aviation services at Dulles and National Airport. Our work improves Fairfax County's competitive position through expanded international domestic air service. Expanding market services from Dulles offers direct advantages for county residents and businesses who rely on air transportation both for personal visits and for business activities. Dulles Airport set an all-time record just short

[00:18:01] of 27 million passengers in 2004, exceeding the previous record in 2005, and combined the two airports served over 52.5 million passengers last year. Another good news, United is committed to major expansion at Dulles and the airport is projecting a 32 percent increase in the next five years. Today, Dulles provides our region with 46 airlines flying to 108 domestic and 61 international destinations.

[00:18:28] AMWA, with the support of United Airlines, continues construction of the new 14-gate concourse that will ultimately replace concourse C&D a long time away. The task force continues our work partnering with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership to study and grow air freight for Dulles Airport.

[00:18:46] A great opportunity for our businesses and especially the biomedical community. We support the work on access to Dulles, supporting the improvements to the American Legion Bridge, working with Maryland to get that done, and very importantly, a second Potomac River crossing.

[00:19:03] I can't fail to mention the terrible accident at National Airport on January 29th. The task force has and continues to advocate for reducing the congestion at National. We successfully fought and built a coalition to reduce the initial request that Congress had for 25 additional flights down to five, but that's still too many.

[00:19:25] I am presenting an optimistic view for Dulles and our air service in our region overall. However, I do have some concerns. The task force will be working diligently to anticipate and address changes to both domestic and international traffic patterns. The current efforts at the federal level and their impact on travel are significant.

[00:19:44] We recently received a report forecasting more than a 5% decrease in international traffic. The potential loss of business for airlines through this cannot be overstated. The task force remains a strong advocate for aviation, supporting flight options for the residents of the county and the region, just as we did through the economic downturn of 2008, COVID-19, and the pandemic, and now.

[00:20:08] Your ongoing support to the task force will enable us to advocate for our airports, a key economic driver of the region, and collaborate with the businesses and tourism sectors that capitalize on this growth. And lastly, we'll continue our role as a major force in advancing air service for the county, businesses, and residents promoting and enhancing connectivity, driving economic development, and job creation. Thank you very much, Vance. Thank you.

[00:20:32] Thank you, Keith. We are now going to move to speaker number eight, Kathy Cole, to be followed by Lucy Biednow. Welcome, Kathy. Thank you. It seems like only yesterday. That's right.

Chairman McKay, members of the Board of Supervisors, County Executive Hill, my name is Kathy Cole, Chair of the Fairfax Area Commission on Aging.

[00:20:57] I address you on behalf of my colleagues, the representatives of Fairfax County, and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church. I'd like to acknowledge the fact that this is a very tough budget year. The Commission appreciates that there are very few direct cuts to programming for older adults in fiscal year 2026 advertised budget, and the Commission does support the proposed additional quarter penny for affordable housing. The Commission studied the proposed budget through two lenses, the first being the goals of Shape the Future of Aging Plan, and the other the

[00:21:34] community outcome areas of the County Strategic Plan. The specific areas of both are the economic opportunity, empowerment, and support for residents facing vulnerability, healthy communities, and housing and neighborhood livability.

[00:21:50] There are reductions in the proposed that are contrary to these priorities that I'd like to bring to your attention. The Commission on Aging asks that you, one, reverse the reduction of supportive and inclusion services provided at senior centers.

[00:22:08] The proposed reduction will decrease the services available to adults with mild to moderate cognitive and physical disabilities who, with support, participate in the day-to-day activities at all 14 senior centers. These services help to bridge the gap between senior centers and adult day healthcare. The impact of this reduction in services would mean that the participants will either be placed in more restrictive environments than necessary, or they will no longer participate in either program, which increases their risk for isolation.

[00:22:44] The numbers of older adults served by this program are impressive. From July 2023 to June 2024, a total of 1,874 older adults were served across all senior centers. From July 2024 to date, 1,539 older adults have been served.

[00:23:07] This is not a small number of people that need additional support to remain in the centers. These older adults are not at the point where adult-day health care is appropriate. Second, we ask that you reverse the proposed elimination of the two FTEs supporting the Senior Community Services Employment Program.

[00:23:28] Senior job creation and placement is a priority for both the economic stability and planning recommendations of SHAPE and the Economic Opportunity Community Outcome Area of the County Strategic Plan. While the intent to move this function to a broader county employment program is commendable, it means the loss of skills the current Senior Community Services Employment Program staff have in working specifically with older adults.

[00:23:57] Third, we ask you to reduce the reduction of funding for case management services provided to adults in emergency shelters. The proposed reduction may impact how quickly adults are able to access permanent housing and might well impact the numbers remaining in shelters and increase homelessness.

[00:24:17] Fourth, we ask you to reverse the elimination of respite services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The elimination of respite services removes the essential support for caregivers. Supporting caregivers is a shared priority.

[00:24:34] And finally, reverse the reduction for funding for the Intensive Case Management Program, which provides comprehensive community-based services to individuals who require higher-level support due to severe mental health issues, resulting in a longer waiting list for services without interim support.

[00:24:56] Leaving these individuals without support may make their situations more acute, requiring more funding later to provide higher levels of support. We ask that you continue programs which allow older adults and adults with disabilities to live with dignity, regardless of the number of those who are served.

[00:25:14] Often neglecting current problems creates bigger problems in the future. At the very least, please consider allowing the programs I've itemized here to continue at the present level of funding. We, the Commission on Aging, believe that these programs align with the future of Aging Plan, the County Strategic Plan Community Outcome Areas, and are in the spirit of one Fairfax.

[00:25:40] Thank you for the opportunity to offer our considerations of the proposed 2026 budget. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number nine is Lucy Biednell, who is here. Welcome. Good afternoon. I'm Lucy Biednell with the ARC of Northern Virginia, and we are very proud to be a Fairfax-based nonprofit since 1962, fulfilling our mission of promoting and protecting rights and services for people with disabilities across the lifespan.

[00:26:10] In recognition that it's a tough budget year and there are going to be some losses, I'm choosing to highlight three specific needs where we feel the impact will be disproportionately harmful to people who need it most and or cause the county more money than we are realizing we're going to spend in eliminating them.

[00:26:27] I would like to thank the Patch Newsletters and the Change.org families by the hundreds who signed petitions to highlight these same three issues. The first is an issue with self-directed services. the county proposed this alternative to funding traditional waiver day and employment services for our grads who leave school without a waiver yet.

[00:26:46] The idea behind self-directed services is we give people 80% of what we would for a traditional day or employment program in exchange for them having flexibility in how they use it. And one of the most innovative uses has been on post-secondary services, programs like College Steps, the George Mason Massey and Life programs that have allowed students with disabilities to go to college or college-like programs for the first time ever. By eliminating that usage within the program, I'm fearful and quite confident those students will then just be ushered into day and employment programs, where we pay 100% of the cost of day and employment programs, and shut down the pathway that's rare in our community to

[00:27:24] post-secondary education. Our second concern is surrounding funding changes to a respite program based in Fairfax County rather than funding the respite beds on an ongoing basis it would be as needed and it would then be available to people who had either private pay or waiver dollars which means the people who already have no waiver and have no money now have no respite and their respite will become the Merrifield Crisis Response Center and our ERs and we don't want to go that route. The final concern I have is on the proposed elimination of three full-time employees with the Services Board who currently helps students transition from Fairfax schools

[00:28:03] to the adult world. Having been in this career for 15 years I can tell you this is the time period that is hardest and scariest for people with developmental disabilities and over and over again I hear it's like falling off a cliff. You're moving from the world where everything is mandated and hub through the school to the world where there is waiting lists, complicated and overlapping programs and without a very firm warm handoff and transition we're going to have students who don't make that leap successfully, parents who lose homes, cars, jobs, trying to hold it together when all of a sudden they have a complicated adult child who has an increase in behaviors and is home all the time.

[00:28:39] We are in support of the proposed quarter penny tax. Can't say enough about the need for affordable housing. Others have covered that beautifully. And the meals tax with a dedication funding for human services where we know there's a need. Thank you all so much for your work in Fairfax. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[00:28:57] Speaker number 10 is Gail Niddle. Is she on the line? Gail, can you hear me? Yes. Welcome. The floor is yours. Thank you. And thank you for holding this meeting. As the supervisor just said, my name is Gail Niddle, and I've lived in Springfield at the same house since 1982.

[00:29:16] When I asked folks who were alarmed at their property assessments and the proposed county budget if they were going to speak at the budget hearings, to a person, they replied, why bother? The Board of Supervisors will do what they want to do, what they've already decided to do.

[00:29:32] Well, just because you can doesn't mean you should. I hope that's not the case. So here I am. I am opposed to the increased property assessments and proposed budget increases and haven't found anyone who is in favor of them. There are people who don't qualify for the assistance given by the county, people who have saved for retirement and who have tried to save for the unknown.

[00:29:55] We have a large retiree community. Here's an example of one such retiree in my own neighborhood. An 89-year-old on a fixed income who is a four-time cancer survivor, now out of medical options, is trying to cut back on expenses by churning out her outside lights and discontinuing the medic alert device that she wears around her neck and has used numerous times.

[00:30:21] Why doesn't she apply for county assistance, do you ask? Because she doesn't meet the threshold. She had no idea that the money that she strived to save over the years to meet those unforeseen expenses in her old age would be the very thing that would disqualify her for help.

[00:30:38] She is not an isolated case. On another subject, Fairfax County citizens voted no on a meals tax twice before. Now that you have the ability to bypass the public, you're proposing a meals tax. That tax would be hard on restaurants, some of whom struggled but made it through COVID.

[00:30:58] It's hard enough to make a living as a small business. It's also hard on local people who patronize their local restaurants. All the time we hear about how we need affordable housing. Well, we do, but not just for the younger set who wants to live in Fairfax County.

[00:31:19] But housing needs to be affordable for those residents who are already here, who perhaps have lived here for years and who want to live out their remaining days here. After retiring, should someone have to take a job just to pay for taxes to live in Fairfax County?

[00:31:35] Many have asked why is the county paying for non-essentials? Things like the COVID memorial, name changes, the roads and schools, while there are proposed cutbacks to essential services.

Why doesn't the board get an independent audit? Live within your income like everyday citizens have to do.

[00:31:55] Why not hold the public school system accountable for the way it spends our money? that's something that could be fixed even though the school board is elected being elected doesn't mean that there shouldn't be oversight and accountability it seems like the county is proud of the fact that they don't give the public school system everything they request is that some kind of a game where the public school asks for more than they really expect to get knowing that they'll still be getting an enormous part of the county budget there are many good things about living in care hex county but the rising cost of living here is not one of

[00:32:31] them. Thank you for your attention. Thank you. And we are now on speaker number 11, Heather Thomas, and Heather will be followed by Peggy Ming, if Peggy is here, and Marlene Blum, in that order. Welcome. Hello, my name is Heather Thomas, and I'm the vice chair of the Community Action Advisory Board and the president of the Fairfax Family Council. Thank you for having me here today.

[00:32:59] As housing costs continue to rise, more and more low-income residents in our community, as well as long-term residents, are being priced out of the county. As impending threats to child care resources continue to elevate, more and more families are finding themselves faced without access to quality, affordable child care.

[00:33:17] Mix that with current economic client, residents are also facing the additional burden of rising food costs, more job losses, cuts to our public schools, and more, leaving many county residents feeling very uncertain about what is to come. For the last few years, I have come here and spoken to all of you about housing and child care crisis that we continue to face in this county.

[00:33:41] My family and I live on a tax credit property, which is considered a viable affordable housing solution. Last year, I came here and told you that our rent was $2,100 per month. This year, it's $2,300 per month, which is $27,600 per year.

[00:33:58] Every year for the last few years, I've come and talked to you about how is this affordable. The reality is it isn't, and you know it's not. While the fourth penny proposed tax increases do provide additional resources for affordable housing, more must be done.

[00:34:17] In addition to exorbitant housing costs, families with children continue to deal with trying to afford child care. For many families, these costs can be more prohibitive, causing families to continue to struggle to work, attend school, which might resort in them deciding how to leave their children in very unsafe situations just to provide food off that table.

[00:34:39] This is why we support the proposed increase to support the Kingstown Child Care Center, so thank you. But more needs to be done so other residents across the county can also have access to these vital services. Lastly, we ask you not to cut the county's Bridge to Kindergarten program that serves over 1,600 children and families that don't have access to early childhood education and this is their only access to it to become kindergarten ready.

[00:35:07] Two of my own children benefited from this program and the reason that they benefited was because they had no access to anything else. Long wait lists, limited slots, and without it, they wouldn't be where they are today. In line with one Fairfax policy, every county resident, regardless of income, deserves a safe place to call home, quality, affordable child care for their children to grow and thrive.

[00:35:33] I want to ask you this year to imagine if it was your families that were facing these issues, what would you want done? Imagine that. Wouldn't you want your leaders, which you are, our elected leaders, to ensure that these problems find realistic solutions?

[00:35:50] Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 12 is Peggy Ming. Is Peggy here? Speaker number 12, Peggy Ming. Let's see. Speaker number 12, speaker 13 is here, Marlene Blum, to be followed by Renee Grebe and Freda Hurwitz. Welcome, Marlene.

[00:36:09] Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay, members of the board. I'm Marlene Blum, chairman of the Health Care Advisory Board. Our complete statement with additional details has been sent to you and is also attached to this testimony. I'm here this afternoon to highlight several issues in the fiscal year 2026 budget.

[00:36:30] First, I'll focus on the health department. Recognizing that the health care labor market continues to be very tight, the Health Care Advisory Board supports the increases in employee compensation to help the county recruit, retain, and fairly compensate staff.

[00:36:45] We also recognize that the county's nonprofit partners play a significant and crucial role in delivering programs and services, and these agencies also face the impacts of inflation and the labor market. The HCAB therefore strongly supports the increased funding for contract rate adjustments included in the advertised budget.

[00:37:05] The Health Care Advisory Board supports the increase in funding to support maintenance of the Joanne Jorgensen Public Health Laboratory, which performs a full range of medical and environmental testing services to aid in the diagnosis, treatment, and surveillance of communicable diseases.

[00:37:22] The county's health lab is the sole local public health laboratory in Virginia, performing over 200,000 analytical tests annually to ensure the health and safety of the Fairfax County community and nearby northern Virginia jurisdictions.

[00:37:38] Last year, the much-needed expansion and renovation of the lab was included in the CIP, and the HCAB recommended that this work be a priority. We applaud the county executive's inclusion of $35 million in the proposed 2026 Health and Human Services Bond Referendum for this purpose, thank the Planning Commission for its support, and urge the board to approve it.

[00:38:03] The HCAB commented at last year's budget hearing that implementing the plan to staff one public health nurse in every county school had been difficult. First funded in the fiscal year 2023 budget, the plan was aimed at compliance with the new state-manded nurse-to-student ratio.

[00:38:22] Given the continuing recruitment and retention difficulties and increasingly severe fiscal constraints, the HCAB supports the proposed reduction of $2.1 million and 30 positions in the school health program budget and the redesign of the program as described in the budget document.

[00:38:40] Full implementation of the new model with a licensed practical nurse in each school is expected to take five years with the first phase eliminating 30 vacant public health nurse positions. The HCAB feels that this new model is a fiscally responsible plan that will enable the health department to build on its ongoing efforts to improve nurse-to-student ratios and to keep pace with the increasingly complex health care needs of our county students.

[00:39:09] I'll focus now on two small but mighty programs that the fiscal year 2026 budget proposes to eliminate. First is the child seat safety and installation program in the police department, which is modestly funded at $45,495. Specially trained police department staff assisted by trained volunteers provide free car seat inspections and installation for parents and others responsible for safely transporting children.

[00:39:40] In calendar year 2024, 1,041 car seats were inspected by the police department. While the sheriff's office also provides a similar service as the budget document suggests, it is available at only one location in the city of Fairfax, unlike the police department program, which is provided at multiple police district locations throughout the county.

[00:40:01] The budget document also suggests that parents could turn to community organizations for this service. But research done by HTAB members indicate that while there are community groups that help low-income families obtain children's safety seats, these organizations do not install or inspect them.

[00:40:20] The HTAB therefore urges the board to restore this modest funding that helps in a big way to protect the health and safety of the kids in our community. The proposed fiscal year 2026 budget also eliminates the Fire and Rescue Department's Community Response Team, otherwise known as CERT program, which was developed under a FEMA initiative designed to provide a standardized nationwide framework for volunteer emergency preparedness training and organization.

[00:40:47] CERT is a force multiplier. It equips community members with essential skills to assist professional responders during disaster situations. CERT volunteers trained in basic disaster response and life-saving skills can provide critical support by giving immediate assistance to victims before first responders arrive on the scene. Over the past four years, more than 1,411 trained volunteers have contributed a total of 69,800 hours in community service and have maintained their training.

[00:41:20] The HCAB urges the board to restore the $34,000 in funding for this program, a small investment with a large return in protecting the health and safety of our community. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 14 is Renee Grieving. She'll be followed by Freda Hurwitz and Stephanie Cornejo.

[00:41:42] Welcome. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and the members of the Board of Supervisors. i'm renee greeby i'm a resident of fairfax county and also nature forwards northern virginia conservation advocate we submitted a more robust set of written comments in conjunction with 15 other partners as part of the fairfax healthy communities network which i co-chair and i'll be highlighting some of those asks today this budget is one of the most challenging we've seen in a long time as we've heard county impacts from federal decisions could still be significant thank you to county executive brian hill and his staff for drafting this tough budget is not an easy task. And with these financial hardships in mind, Nature Forward supports

[00:42:21] diversifying the county's tax bases. We support both the 2% increase in the transient occupancy tax as well as a 4% advertised meal tax. When Virginia gives us the authority to implement these options, we must grab them by the horns. We need every tool in the toolbox to continue to support Fairfax County residents in the best way possible. And these taxes both give the opportunity for for non-residents to help contribute to funding our budget that's really great for the meals tax specifically our neighboring counties and cities have already been implementing it we are behind on that front these are no brainers so we ask that you support the two percent transient occupancy tax and

[00:43:00] the four percent meals tax in terms of housing we've already heard about that thank you for the additional quarter penny of baseline funding proposed for affordable housing continued progress on this front will help us reach the board's goal of two percent two cents on the real estate tax by FY 27 in or we say housing policy is climate policy so it's an important component for sure sustainable transportation in support of meeting greenhouse gas production goals of CCAP we urge the board to sustain funding that ensures the safety of people can walk and bike and use transit so we ask you to restore the funding in

[00:43:37] the following two categories two FTEs impacting FC dots capacity and active transportation capital projects and transit operations and also crossing guards at FCPS's high schools we need to ensure the safety of our kids and lastly Fairfax County Park Authority funding FCPA funding this category is near to dear my heart as an invasive management area leader for a site in the Franconia district in my personal capacity and it's an important component that we've advocated for on behalf of Nature Forward as well we thank the board for its many years are beginning to restore the FCPA funding cuts from

[00:44:14] decades ago and we know that every department is facing cuts and we urge the board to restore funding for FCPA in three different areas $200,000 for forestry services regardless of funding FCPA will need to deal with the high risk hazard trees and that means money cut from their forestry budget will come from elsewhere so that's going to undermine their ability to protect their and others properties but also to provide the services that those funds have been supporting that had to be redirected to forestry remember FCPA's budget before this cut was focused only on the highest danger trees so there really isn't fat to be cut we asked to restore two hundred and fifty thousand

[00:44:53] dollars for trail maintenance that proposed fifty percent cut and trail maintenance will undermine not only public confidence in the ability for the county to maintain what it has let alone build additional trails but also undermine the connectivity provided by the 342 miles of trails in the park system and for those two items we recognize they could be funded with one off third third quarter carryover funds so we urge the county to do that if it's not possible to find space in the general fund and lastly we ask you to restore $65,000 in the general fund in support of the IMA ecologist one position we know that we are currently losing the battle for invasive plants and we know

[00:45:31] the urban forestry management division that the increase in tree canopy is likely due in part to invasive plants taking over our trees which will ultimately kill them we know that we have a backlog of IMA site leaders who aren't able to be onboarded because of this lack of staff capacity so we urge you to restore the high ROI funding for this position last year I stood here asking for the board to think hard about what seeds we can plant today to grow and achieve what we said we would so I stand here today with the same ask the current climate crisis is affecting and will continue to affect how healthy and resilient

[00:46:06] our county is. And investments in housing so people can live where they work and stay where they already are, as we heard earlier. A safety of getting to and using sustainable transportation and investments in our parks are three core asks for this year. Thank you so much for your time, consideration, and your dedication and leadership. Thank you, Renee. Speaker number 15 is Freda Herwitz. Is Freda Herwitz here? To be followed by Stephanie Cornejo. Stephanie and Lydia Lawrence.

[00:46:35] Welcome. Good afternoon. My name is Freda Herwitz. Although I'm speaking about my 19-year-old son, Noah, who attends Nova Alexandria, please consider our story a proxy for other families facing similar challenges. Single-parent homes like ours, families who couldn't leave work today, are uncomfortable speaking in public, were recently fired, or for whom English is a second language. This is

my understanding. The CSB's mission is to provide and coordinate a system of community-based supports for individuals and families of Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church who are affected by developmental disability. Fairfax County,

[00:47:13] like many others, must cut its budget. The CSB funds three secondary education programs for people with disabilities, one of which is College Steps, and all three are on the chopping block. On April 16th, last week, we were told that we can apply for up to $10,000 in funding versus the $18,000 we currently receive that helps cover a full academic year of College Steps. That same day, we were told by May 15th, we must submit a signed PDF that proves we've secured whatever network of individuals our kids need to replace one College Steps program at

[00:47:49] Nova, which boasts a dedicated room on campus, one-to-one support, and group socialization experiences. If we don't hit this deadline, we become ineligible for funding. And here's a fun In fact, with no explanation, we were told that the $10,000 could not be used to pay for College Steps, a program you approved.

[00:48:09] So assuming we can find these people in less than a month, lessons aren't allowed to take place at home where children are most comfortable. All support must occur in the community because that's where SDS funds are proved to be spent. And I quote, your son could go to Starbucks or the library.

[00:48:26] First, how flippant, but more importantly, how conducive to studying when you're neurodivergent and struggle to focus at the best of times. I can't cope working in a coffee shop, but you expect my autistic son to learn biology there? Do you understand that raising a child with a disability is just more expensive, period?

[00:48:47] That disrupting routine is destabilizing. And imagine what it's like for families to manage change when disability is involved. That removing college steps, a structured, effective environment built on trust and which operates in the community as per SDS's requirements, will have an inevitable negative effect that's likely to result in kids dropping out of higher education.

[00:49:08] This will impact loneliness, homelessness, mental health and well-being, and unemployment. What I see as the future common denominator for this county is increased costs, but an avoidable drain on this budget. Your short-term reaction is counterintuitive to long-term vision, growth, and local prosperity.

[00:49:28] By the way, Noah's working towards his AA right now and hoping to one day transfer to GMU to study criminology. Here's the kicker, and I quote, Mom, if I don't have college steps supporting me, I might as well drop out now from the mouths of babes. Without tailored educational support, our kids have little hope of achieving their goals.

[00:49:47] Imagine if this were your child. I implore the board to do the right thing and continue supporting our children who want to flourish and experience fulfilled lives while meaningfully contributing to society, just like you and everybody else in this room. Thank you. Thank you. We are on speaker number 16, Stephanie Cornejo, to be followed by Lydia Lawrence and Annie Noble. In that order. Hello, my name is Stephanie Cornejo. Thank you for your time and attention. I'm speaking as a county employee, a parent, and a resident of Reston. My daughter attends the Fairfax County Employee Child Care

[00:50:23] Center, the ECCC. As a woman working in Fairfax County, I have felt supported every single day until the county indicated that they planned to close the ECC and privatize it. 15 hours and 50 minutes. That's how old my daughter was a year ago today, and I felt completely supported by my workplace to have a child, go back to work, and continue working because of our county-run daycare.

[00:50:50] Today, she's a year old. The ECC supports me as an employee. The Employee Child Care Center is more than just a place where I drop off my daughter each morning. The teachers and staff don't merely provide child care. They offer critical early education, guidance, and social development. I have no doubt you're immensely proud of their public service.

[00:51:12] If you are a parent, an aunt, an uncle, a guardian, or have a woman in your life who has faced the real challenge of whether they could go to work and afford daycare or need to stop working to take care of their kid, the reality is, even in 2025, there is a real barrier for women's participation in the workplace.

[00:51:34] The difficulty of balancing work and family responsibilities negatively and disproportionately affect women's participation in the workforce. Removing the ECCC will put your current and future employees in that inequitable position like myself. Finding an affordable, quality child care shouldn't be the reason Fairfax employees are forced to leave the workplace.

[00:51:56] An article published on April 10th of this year on WAMU outlined that the county's concern about reduced enrollment in child care centers due to federal workforce reductions, meaning there's a concern of child care centers staying open in our county and even offering enrollment for new spots in this area.

[00:52:14] Closing the ECC at a crucial time when other day care centers may not have open spots is not the right choice. The ECCC is a crucial employee retention tool in workforce development investment. The ECC is a lifeline. In snowy conditions earlier this year, my friends who had children in other day cares, their day cares were closed all week.

[00:52:35] The ECC was open all week, and I can show up to work the rest of that week. And that was just a lifeline. The ECC symbolizes Fairfax County's commitment to supporting its workforce. Even the county strategic plan supports the continued operation of the ECC as a county service as part of its economic opportunities and lifelong learning strategies.

[00:52:55] I urge you to preserve the ECC. I urge you to work with county employees, work with parents, work with the child care staff to keep it as a county-run daycare. I thank you very much for your time and attention today. Have a good one. Thank you.

[00:53:10] Our next speaker is Lydia Lawrence, followed by Annie Noble, and then Jade Leadham. Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Board of Supervisors. My name is Lydia Lawrence, and I am a Drainsville District resident and the chair of the Fairfax Parks Coalition.

[00:53:33] Our coalition represents organizations and Fairfax County residents who are dedicated to creating a park system that serves every county resident equitably and protects our natural resources. The coalition recognizes the challenges that the county faces for this budget.

[00:53:54] We understand that you, as our elected officials, must carefully balance numerous priorities to meet all resident needs. For this reason, the coalition spent many hours determining what are the most

critical priorities to keep our county parks safe and acceptable for residents.

[00:54:13] Please refer to our written testimony that was sent to you electronically. We ask the board to restore the following proposed cuts to the Fairfax County Park Authority budget. Please restore $250,000 for trail maintenance funding so that we can maintain trail access for all county residents, especially those who rely on our trails for transportation.

[00:54:39] Please restore $200,000 for forestry operations so that FCPA can continue to address high-risk trees that could injure park visitors or damage county resident property. And please restore the funding for the Invasive Management Area Ecologist 1 position so that FCPA can continue to manage and train volunteers to treat the numerous invasive plants hurting our forests.

[00:55:06] To help balance our budget and provide the county with critical revenue diversification for years to come, we urge the board to pass the meals tax at the advertised rate of 4%. A 4% meals tax would align us with a majority of surrounding Northern Virginia localities who have both a similar meals tax and a thriving restaurant industry.

[00:55:30] Our meals tax study showed that 28% of this income would come from people living outside the county. And this seems like a superior alternative to continually raising the real estate tax, which impacts every county resident, wealthy, impoverished, renter, or homeowner.

[00:55:50] And finally, please pass the 2% transient occupancy tax and consider earmarking a part of it for tourism for our flagship parks and trails. Fairfax Parks Coalition works hard to engage all your residents in advocating on the budget process and advocating for better parks.

[00:56:10] And so this spring, we facilitated individualized letters from every constituent in your district, from high school to retirement community age, in English and in Spanish. So I bring you the words of two of those letters today.

[00:56:27] The first one comes from Rebecca in Dranesville District, and she says, My name is Rebecca, and I'm really proud and happy to live in Fairfax, due in large part to the parks we have. I've lived in China for a long time with bad air quality and little access to green spaces.

[00:56:47] So now that I am back in Virginia, I always take advantage of our parks as both a visitor and a volunteer. Please do not cut FCPA trail maintenance funding. We use them not just for fun, but to get places we need to go, and cutting down on traffic and emissions.

[00:57:05] The more people use cars, the worse our air quality will be, and I know firsthand how tough that is on people mentally and physically. Fairfax Parks already gets so little of the county budget compared to all other sectors.

[00:57:21] Please do not cut what we do not have. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 18 is Annie Noble, to be followed by Jade Liedham and Diana Reese. Welcome. Thank you. Thank you so much for being here. And I just want to say, oh, you're good.

[00:57:39] Thank you, everybody else who is here. This is beautiful and inspiring to see people come out and say things. This is my first time. I'm here because my daughter, Alana Noble, I should start. I'm Annie Noble. My daughter, Alana Noble, is currently at an afterschool program at Rocky Run, and that's why she couldn't come here today. She wanted to sign up to speak, but I am coming on her behalf. I am a Fairfax County resident of 27 years, a Chantilly homeowner for 17 years, and like I said, a parent to a 13-year-old

and now a 14-year-old who turns 15 next week. We are a double-income family. We relied on SAC when my kids were little.

[00:58:18] At the time, I was not making much money, just starting out as a federal employee. Really exciting time to be a federal employee. And SAC was so great that I even was asked to be on the SAC advisory board a little bit, so I got to see that.

[00:58:36] And then it was time for them to go to middle school. I was terrified. How was I going to figure out how to get them home? How was I going to figure out taking care of them if I still had to work? but then I learned about the robust after-school programs.

[00:58:52] These programs are so amazing. So I came here today to speak out in favor of keeping these programs. These programs benefit parents, like myself. They benefit kids. As you heard from them at the last budget meeting, they all came to speak up, and they benefit the community overall.

[00:59:11] I spoke about lower-income parents, a lot of times can't afford all the extracurriculars, the team sports, the piano lessons, the things, and also there's getting them to those things. As for kids, my kids, I know, and they're friends, they found themselves in these after-school programs.

[00:59:30] They got to try everything. They tried watercolors. They tried sewing. They tried Dungeons & Dragons. My non-athletic 13-year-old even tried cross-country because her friend was doing it, and they could just sign up, and it was low commitment.

[00:59:46] I didn't have to buy them uniforms and then argue later when she lost interest. It's just so important. And as for the people who don't have kids or who don't have kids in middle school, it's just two years, right? What can it matter? Well, this is such an important time for kids who are learning who they are.

[01:00:06] And so if we just release those kids after school out into the streets without parental supervision because dual-income parents, These are the times when it's very easy to fall in with the wrong element, and all of a sudden, before you know it, they're becoming a problem for the community, and we don't want that.

[01:00:26] So I'm hoping to—oh, I need to hurry up. I know it costs a lot, but I'm also in favor of the meal tax and diversifying the way we get money because this is just a tiny line item. I am a homeowner, so I don't want my real estate income taxes to go up.

[01:00:47] But don't be penny wise and pound foolish. Please protect these programs. Thank you so much. Thank you. Speaker number 19 is Jade Leadham. Jade is here to be followed by Diana Reese and Kimberly Lawrence. If I called your name, please be ready to testify.

[01:01:04] Welcome. Members of the Board of Supervisors, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jade Liedem, and I'm the CEO of Second Story, succeeding Judith Didman, whom many of you know. Judith dedicated 30 years of building this organization, and after nearly 16 years with Second Story myself, I'm honored to carry her legacy forward, ensuring that vulnerable youth and young families in our community have a safe and supportive place to turn.

[01:01:33] Over the past few months, I really enjoyed connecting with many of you during office visits, events, and spending time in our programs. It's clear that the impact of our work is strengthened by the partnership we share with you. Joining me today is our board, well, we have two board members who are

joining me today, Rabob and Kevin, who's here to show their support for our mission, as well as continuity of our sufficient funding to sustain vital community-based program services like Second Story.

[01:02:04] Thank you both for being here. Second Story is a nonprofit with over 53 years of experience serving youth and young families. We provide safe housing and comprehensive wraparound services to teens, young mothers, and young adults experiencing homelessness, supporting them on their path to self-sufficiency and independence.

[01:02:24] In partnership with Fairfax County, we also operate after-school programs and family resource centers and serve as the lead agency for opportunity neighborhoods in the Bailey's Crossroads area. These programs are not just supportive. They are preventative. In communities where many families live at or below the poverty line, our after-school sites offer mentorship, structure, and safety, keeping youth away from drugs, gangs, and violence.

[01:02:51] Without these programs, many young people would be left unsupervised and vulnerable, increasing the risk of falling into cycles of crime, substance abuse, or academic failure. Families access vital resources, too, like food, translation services, and workforce training, helping them stabilize so their children can thrive. Without access to these supports, families could face deeper hardship, leading to housing insecurity, unemployment, and limited opportunities for their children's future. In 2024 alone, Second Story housed and supported

[01:03:25] 131 young people and their children. We served 412 students through our after-school programs. We provided nearly 20,000 drop-in services at our family resource centers and distributed food to over 2,600 individuals.

[01:03:42] But I come to you today with concern. Given ongoing uncertainty in federal and county funding, we're deeply worried about program sustainability. All of Second Story's programs are critical and rely on county or pass-through dollars. Three of our community-based programs in particular, our Colmar and Springfield Family Resource Centers and the Opportunity Neighborhood Program, are funded under the county's Neighborhood Initiative Program contract.

[01:04:10] Despite the 5% escalator we received last year, we still faced funding gaps of 60%, 29%, 22%, respectively, in fiscal year 24. Our teen center, which was initially a joint venture between the county and second story, has cost us almost $180,000 more than the funding received from the CCFP.

[01:04:31] The total cost to run the center was approximately $248,000, with only $69,375 covered by CCFP. We've increased private fundraising significantly, but it's being stretched thin across all of our programs.

[01:04:47] That strain is not sustainable, and without additional support this year, we will face difficult decisions that directly affect the youth and families in our county. On a personal note, I moved to Fairfax County from South Korea in 1988. I know firsthand how hard it can be for parents to navigate new systems while working tirelessly to support their families.

[01:05:10] I've seen how that stress can weigh on children, forcing them to grow up too fast, often without guidance. Second Story exists to change that. We offer stability, support, and a chance for young people to simply be kids and for families to get back on solid ground.

[01:05:28] The funding decisions you make this year will directly impact the future of our young people. We ask you to stand with us so we don't have to turn away a child who needs safety or a family looking for support. This is an investment in our youth, in families working towards stability, and in the kind of community we all believe in.

[01:05:47] Thank you for considering this urgent need and for all you do to support the residents in our county. And up next is Diana Reyes, a bright young leader, youth council member, and youth board member at Second Story. Thank you for your time.

[01:06:02] Thank you, and welcome, Diana. Hello, everyone. Bear with me. I am a little bit nervous. No worries. Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

[01:06:20] I am Diana Reyes Morales, and I am 16 years old. I am in 10th grade attending ACHS, which is known as Alexandria City High School. I, for the most part, my entire life has lived in Coolmore. I know firsthand how it is, how you can't go outside without being worried.

[01:06:41] You see your younger siblings, you need to keep an eye on them because you see people running, gang members and the violence in the community. Coolmore and Springfield are the most two districts that I've noticed that have lots of gang violence, lots of fighting, middle schoolers being recruited to join gangs. I firsthand did not write a speech as long. I wanted to speak from what I experienced, what family have experienced, and what have my friends experienced. We have done events within

[01:07:13] Second Story thanks to the Youth Council. It's been brighter for us as a community thanks to second story. We were able to fight against the opioid epidemic that happened. We were able to combine each other's ideas and form a way to speak to the community through art. We spoke, we designed, we painted, we did whatever we wanted, and we expressed how we felt and understood opioids,

[01:07:48] What we saw in families, what we've experienced, what we wanted to show children and parents, especially parents, that your kids see everything. Your kids are there. You might think they don't understand, but they do understand that you need to acknowledge that.

[01:08:07] And thanks to Second Story, they provided so many programs for me and my family. My mom is a single mother raising seven kids total. She did not. She came here not knowing Spanish. I meant English, sorry. Not one bit. She came with my brother. She came here trying to raise all of us. Thanks to Second Story, she had to support. She didn't finish high school. The max that she has been through was grade 6. She can't help me with my homework. She can't help me with my English, my grammar.

[01:08:43] So thanks to Second Story, I have that support. I have that safety. I have somewhere to go after school. And my mom has that support as well. It's not just me. My mom has been going to the English classes that the community provides.

[01:09:02] It's been beautiful for her to understand that she can also learn that it's not just us, that she can learn English, that she can actually do this. Sorry. you're good and i just wanted to finish off that having second story was a major impact in me and my family learning to create a film to show our peers that dating violence is not okay to show yourself that you have value that you have standards and with second story i we were able

[01:09:35] to all do that in the community thank you so much thank you very much we are uh speaker number on speaker number 21. I appreciate the enthusiasm. I'll just remind folks, we've got a hundred

more people that want to get in tonight before midnight. So let's think about those other speakers.

[01:09:58] Speaker number 21 is Kimberly Lawrence to be followed by Suzanne Levy and Jennifer McGarry. Welcome. Hi, I'm to the board. Thank you for having me. I am here tonight to speak to the community services board fund 440 specifically line item under the SDS program regarding post-secondary education the proposed cuts will have a devastating ripple effect on our neurodivergent community the funds

[01:10:37] provided allow our kiddos to utilize as you've heard programs like college steps at the Nova campuses and then there is GMU Massey and EFP programs at George Mason these programs provide these program supports provide an extensive list of benefits that are critical for becoming independent adults who will one day be able to secure a job and become an active and productive member of society these the services include one-to-one mentorship in class aids time

[01:11:13] management, study skills, study assistance, learning and becoming comfortable with their peers in terms of social activities. Our son, Trey, would not have been able to navigate college without college steps.

[01:11:32] To eliminate this program abruptly is a disservice, and he needs your help. We are appreciative of every dollar that we receive from the county, and we realize that it is a gift and a blessing, and it is not mandatory.

[01:11:55] So we appreciate that. We were made aware of these changes, I think, first when the budget was announced. And a week or so ago, we were then offered the alternative options that we could choose to replace the College Steps and the GMU.

[01:12:24] Currently, there are no alternatives that compare. There are none. They are college steps, and they are all-encompassing, and the program covers all the things that our children and those with disabilities and neurodivergent and our families, they cover, encompass all of those things instead of having a tutor here, needing to have a social group here, we have to go here to get this, those things.

[01:12:52] they're able to do these things and they become more confident and they self-advocate more and they actually look forward to going to school they look forward to getting out of college and getting a job oh crap sorry just for me to finish up I've registered my son for summer and fall classes contracts have been signed schedules adjusted transportation set up so now here I am And we have a month to decide for me to figure out what the heck I'm going to do.

[01:13:27] Our community, it takes time for our kiddos to, for us to find ways to help them. There are wait lists. It takes months. Sometimes it takes years. And I don't feel that we were, we have not been afforded that opportunity.

[01:13:46] Thank you. ask is that for each member of a district to engage with our families, get to know what we need and see what our struggles are and what we face daily. And let's have constructive and transparent conversations. Thank you for your testimony.

[01:14:02] And if there's pieces that you didn't get to, you can feel free to email those into us and we'll circulate them for you. Thank you very much. Speaker number 22 is Suzanne Levy to be followed by Jennifer McGarry and Nicole Zupan if I called your name please be down here close ready to testify welcome good afternoon to you mr. chairman and members of the board my name is Suzanne Levy and I

am the chair of the Fairfax County Public Library Board of Trustees I appreciate the time you have given me today to speak to you about one of our community's most visible vital and

[01:14:40] trusted resources, our libraries. Thank you for a proposed budget that allows us to continue to provide excellent service to our residents. Fairfax County Public Library is the largest and busiest public library system, not only in Virginia, but also in the entire southern United States.

[01:15:00] In fiscal year 2024, FCPL logged over 3.2 million visits to our branches, with an average of over 260,000 visitors per month. We provided more than 66,000 public service hours over 23 sites last year, eight of them being open seven days a week. This budget includes the ability for us to open the new Kingstown branch, co-located in the new Franconia Governmental Center as a ninth regional library, although some additional help will be needed in FY28 to make that permanent.

[01:15:37] FCPL contributes to nearly all of the county's strategic plan areas, but most notably, lifelong learning, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and cultural and recreational opportunities. Your local library is a place to pursue your interests, feed your imagination, connect with different people and ideas, and discover more about the world around you.

[01:16:03] FCPL offers free programs and events throughout the year for all ages, ranging from author presentations to early literacy story times, crafting workshops and yoga classes, to tax assistance for seniors. These activities pay dividends to the community in terms of early literacy, readiness for school learning, and support for lifelong learning to be ready for the many different challenges life brings, shared equitably over the entire community. Last year, these uses provided

[01:16:37] an estimated return of $5.50 per dollar invested, or over $257 million in value from the use of our materials, programs, and facilities. The library's materials collection provides a substantial value to the community and includes a great diversity of formats, topics, and items of interest to all ages. Both physical and digital book collections are heavily used, but many customers have to wait months before their holds become available. In FY 2024, FCPL circulated just under 12 million

[01:17:13] items and recorded over 3.6 million checkouts of digital materials. For FY 25, we predict almost 4 million digital material checkouts. Our annually reported numbers would be even higher, but because of inflation and high-demand customer wait times have doubled for digital materials to a two-month wait on average, with many customers waiting over three months for the most in-demand items. The library board is incredibly grateful that our library system is not taking larger cuts, considering the reductions the county is planning across the board.

[01:17:51] However, the permanent underinvestment in the library collection budget that has been discussed for several years needs to be addressed. The diminished baseline budget cut by over half and never restored is putting Fairfax County residents at a competitive disadvantage with what we have observed in the region and around the country.

[01:18:13] In FCPL staff's answer to a budget request from Supervisor Herity, they confirmed that the county's investment in new library materials for its residents has shrunk from more than $6 million per year in FY2000 to just $3.05 million in FY2024, a 53% reduction.

[01:18:34] The county is investing less than $3 per resident per year for new materials, while peer library systems are investing $7 to $8 per resident per year. As we shared in last year's joint meeting with you, we are facing substantial inflationary pressures, especially in the e-book and e-audiobook market.

[01:18:55] We are grateful for the carryover funds and other help that allows us to supplement the initial allocation of $3 million to $1 to $2 million by $1 to $2 million per year. However, even that help falls short of where we need to be to provide enough materials in a timely fashion.

[01:19:16] It is also more efficient and effective if our staff have the full allocation at the beginning of the fiscal year instead of near its end. The repeated shortfall in library materials investment has several negative impacts on residents, including increasing wait times, decreasing selection of titles, and to illustrate one case, a comparison of books on artificial intelligence materials between Fairfax and Montgomery counties suggests that Fairfax only has 25% of the titles available compared to Montgomery County.

[01:19:50] The Library Board knows you are supportive of this issue, as demonstrated last spring and in years past. Please support a multi-year plan to restore our baseline budget for annual investment in new knowledge and ideas to best support our 1.2 million lifelong learners at a per-resident level that is competitive with our regional and national peers.

[01:20:17] Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Jennifer McGarry, to be followed by Nicole Zupan and Tayla Schultz. Welcome. Honorable Chair McKay and members of the Board of Supervisors.

[01:20:34] My name is Jennifer McGarry, and I proudly serve on the Board of Directors of the Fairfax Library Foundation. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Fairfax County Public Library and the many residents who rely on it as a vital resource in their daily lives.

[01:20:50] The library is more than a building filled with books. It is a dynamic, inclusive hub of learning, connection, and opportunity. From story time for toddlers to resume workshops for job seekers, our public library serves every age, background, and community in Fairfax County.

[01:21:07] In fiscal year 2025 alone, FCPL served over a million residents, many of whom rely on it for access to digital resources, homework help, language learning, and job training. Yet despite the growing demand for the library, the library's materials collection budget remains underfunded.

[01:21:26] The fiscal year 2026 proposed collection budget is $3.185 million, which is less than 10% of the total library budget and virtually unchanged since 2010. When adjusted for inflation and population growth, this stagnation has led to a diminished access to current and essential materials.

[01:21:48] In fiscal year 25, the county invested only $2.51 per resident, a stark contrast of $6.26 per resident in 2002. Nearby jurisdictions like Montgomery County and Baltimore County are investing significantly more, up to $8 per resident.

[01:22:10] What does this mean in real terms for our community? High wait times for popular e-books, often with hundreds of people on hold for a single title. outdated non-fiction materials in critical subjects like medicine, computer science, and parenting, insufficient resources for students and lifelong learners, including a limited number of homework-related and research materials.

[01:22:33] I urge the Board to approve a permanent increase of $900,000 per year to the collection budget. This is a modest but essential reinvestment that would begin to restore the breadth, depth, and timeliness of our Library's collection. It will help ensure that residents have access to the up-to-date materials they need to succeed, whether in school, the workplace, or in everyday life.

[01:22:59] Last year, thanks to the voices of the advocates across the county, a one-time addition of $500,000 was approved. This year, let's build on that momentum and make a lasting commitment to our libraries. An increase to the materials budget is not just about books.

[01:23:14] It's about equity, access, and the future of education and opportunity in Fairfax County. The Fairfax County Library is one of our community's greatest assets. I respectfully ask that you invest in it accordingly. Thank you for your consideration. Thank you. Speaker number 24 is Nicole Zupan, to be followed by Talia Schultz.

[01:23:36] If you're here, to be followed by Halel Schultz. Welcome. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Board of Supervisors. My name is Nicole Zupan. I am a special educator in Fairfax County Public Schools, And I'm here to speak against the cuts to the self-directed services program that are currently on the table.

[01:23:58] Our family has lived in Burke in the Braddock District for 21 years. Our son, Joseph, has autism and a seizure disorder and just recently turned 25 years old. He's got a great memory, loves to rock a checklist to give structure to his day, and is a whiz at puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, word searches, you name it.

[01:24:18] Joseph exited out of FCPS in June of 2022. Because we could not find consistent care for him, I actually had to quit my job with FCPS at the time. Lacking the Developmental Disabilities Waiver, we utilized the Self-Directed Services Program to find and pay for activities that gave him that much-needed structure and engaging programming that allowed him to be an active part of his community.

[01:24:43] These activities included swim classes at the local rec center, riding lessons at Simple Changes, and participating in a non-waiver day program called A Purposeful Day, where he was encouraged to use his assistive technology to communicate because he is mostly nonverbal, volunteered in the community, learned social skills, did travel training, and where generally he enjoyed being a part of a group of his peers.

[01:25:08] We have experienced firsthand how this Self-Directed Services Program provides the means by which a young adult can engage in a variety of community activities that would otherwise be closed to them. Without this program, our son would not have had the financial means to access these activities and would have led a much more isolated existence.

[01:25:30] These activities are a portal for our young people to become meaningful, productive members of Fairfax County. And the Self-Directed Services Program gives them that opportunity to participate to the fullest extent possible. I oppose the proposed cuts to the Self-Directed Services Program because I have seen firsthand the benefits that it provides to our grads with disabilities.

[01:25:52] Please help us help them live a life like yours, a life of meaningful engagement, doing the things they love in the community they love. Thank you very much. Thank you. Speaker number 25 is Talia Schultz.

[01:26:08] Talia is here, Halal Schultz will be following, and following that will be Les Shockley. If you're here, please be ready to testify. Welcome. Thank you. Please, at a minimum, keep the funding for the fire and rescue emergency vehicles, especially the medical transports.

[01:26:28] I've been to every fire station in the county, and I wanted to share with you some of what I learned. For instance, do you know how many ambulances are at each station? I must admit, I thought

there was a whole fleet. The answer is usually one, possibly two, if there happen to volunteers there. I also learned that firefighters are trained as EMTs first, and that most calls are medical.

**[01:26:47]** Trucks such as those proposed for cuts all carry a paramedic on board by design, even though they can't transport patients on the truck. Another thing I learned is the most recent station is number 44. There are actually 39 stations in Fairfax County. This means that right now, we have less than 50 ambulances available to cover a population of over a million people, spread over 408 square miles.

**[01:27:08]** In the proposed cuts, four stations would lose their ambulances, which means there are none nearby to transport someone to the hospital in these parts of the county. Without these units, nearby stations would need to respond instead, increasing their workloads and also adding to the time to respond to an emergency. If these vehicles are working, when another call comes in, another station would need to respond.

**[01:27:29]** This creates a ripple effect throughout the county as stations end up responding to a larger area as a result of having fewer vehicles available. Surely you know someone who's had a stroke, a heart attack, or trauma where every second counted to save that person's life, and they needed immediate transport to a hospital. Your decision on this issue can have life or death implications.

**[01:27:47]** Combine, these four medical vehicles went on 4,584 calls just last year. Since the population in the county is increasing, it means even more calls are expected each year, so anything, we should be adding transports. As you've likely noticed, the stations for cuts are near the borders with other counties.

**[01:28:05]** You might think could fill the gap. recently visited Station 439 to the north and learned they often receive requests to help in Loudoun County because the Loudoun units were already on calls rather than the other way around, which means counting on them to fill in is not as realistic as it may seem. I mapped out the stations in Prince William County and discovered the limited roads across Bull Run and the Occoquan Reservoir on the southern county border add even more time to their response if they are available.

**[01:28:31]** There are also two rescue trucks set to be cut, plus more. When I visited recently with the rescue squad at station 21, I learned they had responded to two different scenes with cars driven into buildings just that day. We need their expertise for these types of situations. Rescue 419 is also planned for cuts. Combined, these two trucks went on over 4,000 calls just last year. In total, the proposed cuts would likely add over 10,000 calls each year to the remaining vehicles.

**[01:28:58]** Firefighters and EMTs were there for us during COVID. It's our time to return the favor. We keep asking them to do more and more while taking away the vehicles they need to respond quickly. Although they're dedicated, they're also human. Overloading them is not the way to keep them for the long term, which would be a loss of valuable training. I'd like to put in a quest to save the Community Emergency Response Team, the middle school after school programs, support for the volunteer firefighters, and support our teachers since they are critical for good schools.

**[01:29:22]** People look heavily at the quality of schools in buying homes as an investment for keeping for future revenue. For all these, the benefit of the county far outweigh the expenses. Thank you. Thank you very much. We are now on speaker number 26, Halal Schultz. Hold on a second, we're going to lower that for you, bud.

[01:29:47] Okay. I can't hold on to it though. Welcome. He wrote this. Yeah. Why are you cutting the fire departments funny?

[01:30:05] They work really hard and risk their lives to save people. Plus, they're my friends and they're cool. I've been to every station in Fairfax and more than that too, so I know how awesome they are. need ambulances to send people to the hospital, especially from stations that are far away from hospitals. We need rescue trucks to help people trapped in cars, collapsing buildings, and water rescues, and more. I think we should be giving them more money, not taking it away. They are really

[01:30:39] good helpers. They are very special. They save people's lives. I know they go on lots of calls because I see them come and go when I visit. We need them. They have lots of training, so we should keep them because other people don't know how to help like they do.

[01:31:01] If they aren't near to answer the calls, then people might die. We should also be good to them so other people want to be firefighters too. Please don't take away their money. Thank you.

[01:31:17] Thank you. Nice job, buddy. The recruitment division might have a letter out to you. He is.

[01:31:32] Thank you. Nice job. We are now on speaker number 27. This is a tough act to follow, but we are on speaker number 27, Les Shockley. Welcome. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and members of the board. My name is Les Shockley, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Fairfax County branch of the NAACP, where Ms. Nikki Zimmerman serves as our president.

[01:31:56] Today, I'm here to speak on the budgetary issues important to the NAACP and the community that it serves. Firstly, we support the proposed food and beverage tax of 4% as an additional revenue source for the county. Fair housing has long been a central priority for the NAACP.

[01:32:14] The branch is thankful for the additional $8.5 million or quarter cent increase to support affordable housing in the proposed budget. We recognize the challenges of the current environment and continue to believe that the Board considers affordable housing to be of crucial importance.

[01:32:31] However, we are very concerned that the Board will not reach its goal of 10,000 new affordable units by 2034, given that under 1,400 units have been completed to date. The NAACP appreciates the county's purchase and operation of the Fair Ridge Center for families experiencing homelessness.

[01:32:50] We also urge you to generously fund services that prevent people from falling into homelessness by providing emergency rental relief and representation in tenants' court. We urge you to restore any cuts as reported in the county executive's advertised agency reductions list that could lengthen the time for homeless people to be rehoused.

[01:33:13] As summer months approach, we urge the county to continue to provide adequate indoor overnight shelter during heat spells. Promoting education has always been a fundamental principle to the NAACP. We support the full funding of the collective bargaining agreement between the Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax Education Union, ratified by the Fairfax County School Board.

[01:33:36] We urge the board to fully fund the CBA to demonstrate that you value our school employees as highly as you did in last year's funding of Public Safety Employees CBA. Our branch finds that many of the county's vacant school job openings are in special education, early childhood education, and resource teachers.

[01:33:59] Early childhood education is key to providing incoming students in the county with a head start on learning and development in a group setting. The NAACP urges the school budget to direct more efforts towards recruitment and retention initiatives in these areas.

[01:34:15] Parents of special needs students often face significant barriers in ensuring appropriate services for their children when disputes arise regarding individualized education program implementation. Parents have the right to due process under the law, but lack the financial means to get legal counsel, placing them at a disadvantage against school districts.

[01:34:36] We propose that the board include in its budget $500,000 to establish funding program to support eligible families in need. Fairfax County has a co-responder program that pairs mental health clinicians with police officers to aid in de-escalation on calls involving individuals in distress.

[01:34:56] Last year, a Fairfax County police officer trained in crisis intervention responded alone to a welfare check on Ms. Sidney Wilson in Reston. Ms. Wilson was experiencing a mental health crisis. The situation escalated, resulting in her shooting death. We understand that crisis intervention positions remain unfilled.

[01:35:15] We urge you to fill these positions, which is a wise investment versus the county facing multimillion-dollar civil suit settlements for wrongful death. The Public Defender's Office defends those arrested who are poor, with many suffering from drug dependency or mental illness.

[01:35:33] Virginia counties have the authority to provide supplemental funding up to 30% of the Public Defender's Office budget. The county provides a 15% supplement to the state-funded program, which is less than a 25% supplement provided by surrounding counties.

[01:35:49] The NAACP is requesting that the board increase its supplement to 25% or $300,000. The county's payback will be derived from reduced incarcerations for minor crimes. Legal matters related to housing, employment, child custody, etc. can upend a family's well-being.

[01:36:08] The NAACP believes these individuals deserve legal counsel to protect their rights even if they cannot afford them. Legal Services of Northern Virginia handles these types of cases, but the organization is severely overburdened.

[01:36:23] We urge the county to commit funding to underwrite legal counsel for low-income clients on these civil matters. In closing, we encourage the board to take bold action and ensure that your budget reflects the values of equity, justice, and opportunity for all residents of Fairfax County.

[01:36:41] Our sincere hope that the board considers these recommendations thoughtfully and responds with the leadership and commitment these issues demand. Thank you. Thank you very much, Les. Have you submitted that written testimony to the board? I will be. Please. Thank you. Thank you.

[01:36:56] We appreciate that. Thank you. We are on speaker number 28, Charlene Murphy. Is Charlene Murphy here? Charlene Murphy. How about speaker number 29, Ross Branstetter? Okay, if you can come on down.

[01:37:14] And Wanda Shelton and Ken Avis, if I've called your name, if you can please come down here close in the front so that when it's your turn, you're ready to testify. Welcome.

[01:37:42] So again, my name is Ross Branstetter. I'm here as a volunteer speaking on behalf of the Fairfax County Community Emergency Response Team. And we are, as most of your speakers are here

today, to ask for your help.

[01:38:01] Specifically, the Community Emergency Response Team program has been proposed in the current budget for elimination, termination. The amount at issue is $34,000. That's not the proposed cut.

[01:38:16] That's the entire amount altogether that would, if the board goes along with it, continue and sustain the program. So with regard to the Community Emergency Response Team program, which is generally referred to by its four-letter acronym, CERT, C-E-R-T, Community Emergency Response Team, I propose to speak very briefly as to two things, three things, what the program is, what it does, and why the board should help.

[01:38:50] With regard to what the program is, it's a follow-on to a program created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after the terrible events of 9-11. It basically educates individuals and families about preparing for and safely responding to emergencies and disasters.

[01:39:11] Every state, the District of Columbia, many tribal governments, and U.S. territories all have the CERT program. Fairfax County has had the CERT program for 20 years. The seed for the program that became very successful was planted in 2003.

[01:39:33] Instructors began training in 2004. Over the course of that time, 5,000 Fairfax County residents have completed the basic training in that program. The basic training in that program requires each person to devote 30 hours of their time to adjust their schedules and their families so that they can commit that 30 hours to receive the program.

[01:39:59] Again, the program has existed for a long time. It does many things, which we don't have time to talk about because you have a lot of speakers you need to listen to. And I'll get out of the way as quickly as I can. I'll point to just two contributions, training residents and supporting the county in county activities.

[01:40:22] With regard to training residents, this typically is focused, as you might expect from the name of the program, on preparing residents for what may be their worst days. With regard to operational support for the county, it is most often intended to help, support, and facilitate county activities on what are often our best days, our largest celebrations.

[01:40:48] We try to do both roles, fill both missions to the extent that we can, and we believe, and hope you believe, that we do it fairly well. With regard to training, again, the basic training is 30 hours, and again, 5,000 county residents have devoted their time, their evenings, usually after work and after school, to take that training.

[01:41:12] As a result, at least 5,000 Fairfax County families are better prepared for, better able to survive and respond to serious emergencies and disasters. With regard to operational support for county activities, again, on what we usually hope are our best days,

[01:41:31] CERT has a large pool of trained, vetted, and organized volunteers, not just individuals, but teams that can be relied on to show up when they're asked to stay in their volunteer lane and to yield to the professional responders every time and in every way that they're asked to do so.

[01:41:54] In terms of the kinds of events that are supported, I'll offer these examples. At races and parades here in the county, CERT has provided courts marshals to protect the racers, to help all the participants, to keep everyone safe to the extent that we can.

[01:42:16] In real-world incidents where fire EMS and police personnel are committed for long hours, the CERT has operated canteen teams, canteen vehicles, to provide food and refreshment to those professional responders so that they can stay on the scene longer and be more effective while they're there.

[01:42:35] With regard to supporting the many county activities, CERT has assisted with traffic and crowd management in very, very many of our activities. For example, Fourth of July fireworks, and I'll stop there and just ask that the board consider helping us to save CERT.

[01:42:58] Thank you. Thank you, Ross, and thank you all to all the CERT folks who are here. I know I'll speak, I can speak for the entire board and say we see you everywhere.

[01:43:13] So thank you. Thank you very much. We are on speaker number 30, Wanda Shelton, to be followed by Kevin Avis and Stuart Holt. Welcome. Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

[01:43:33] My name is Wanda Shelton. I lived in Fairfax County for 24 years. I graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso, and I've been a teacher at the Fairfax County Employed Child Care Center for 20 years. For two decades, I've had the privilege of supporting the children of our county employees, offering them high-quality care, early education, and a nurturing environment that helps them thrive while their parents serve our community.

[01:44:02] This center isn't just a building, it's a lifeline. It's a critical support system for county employees, many of whom work demanding jobs that directly benefit the public. Knowing their children are in a safe, loving, and educational environment allows them to fully focus on their responsibilities, whether that's public safety, social services, public health, or any of the other crucial departments that keep our community running smoothly.

[01:44:30] During the pandemic, I was proud to continue showing up every day as an essential worker. While many stayed home, I and my colleagues remained in the classroom to care for the children of first responders, health department employees, and county staff who couldn't work remotely. We didn't hesitate because we knew our work mattered, not just to the children, but to every parent who could continue serving this county because they had trusted child care.

[01:44:56] Closing the center to balance the budget underbinds more than the line item. It impacts families, employee morale, and ultimately the quality of service our county provides. This is not a luxury. It's a benefit that supports workforce stability and retention.

[01:45:12] Our center helps attract and retain dedicated and experienced public servants. Taking it away sends the message that their sacrifices and the well-being of their families are in a priority. I love my position. I've poured my heart into this job for 20 years, watching babies take their first steps, teaching toddlers their first words, and preparing preschoolers for kindergarten.

[01:45:36] I've supported generations of county families, and I'm not alone. This center is staffed by passionate professionals who are deeply committed to their work, and we cannot be replicated through privatization by a cheaper version of ECCC. I urge you, please reconsider the decision to close the center.

[01:45:54] The long-term cost to our employees, our children, and our community will far outweigh any short-term savings. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker 31, Ken Avis.

[01:46:11] Speaker number 31, Ken Avis, to be followed by Stuart Holt and Julian DePhillips.

[01:46:25] A little more love, hate, destroy, and a whole lot more creed standing.

[01:47:10] We'll go a long, long way to make a place a little less hurt and a little less pain.

[01:47:41] There's not so much to lose, there's a whole lot more to gain, a little more equality, go a long, long way, world, a better place, where the libraries make a change, sick and tired of hearing, about those hopes and prayers, a little blaming, and a little care, and a little sharing, go a long, long way, this world, a better place.

[01:48:50] you can sing if you like Thank you so much My name's Ken Avis with Lynn here we are full-time musicians living and working in Fairfax County As you'll tell from my accents

[01:49:29] we're not originally from this area but like you we're thankful to have moved here and to be in a place that not only offers a great quality of life but also a vibrant cultural scene where creativity is celebrated. Fairfax is a place where people come to build their lives, to raise their children and educate their families and to enjoy a rewarding retirement and as musicians we see ourselves as contributors to that lively cultural fabric both as performers and presenters and even as educators. Our band Verono has released six albums. We've had National

[01:50:05] and international acclaim we perform about a hundred shows a year in Fairfax and beyond at venues ranging from the Kennedy Center to Blues Alley the DC Jazz Festival and in addition to that performing in local schools and senior centers and even places like the Fairfax County Parks summer concert series which is a fantastic thing we also curate music for two local non-profits for the Creative Cauldron and for McLean Project for the Arts.

[01:50:36] Each year at these venues, we present over 30 performances, including two month-long music series and a full-day festival of music at McLean Art Fest. These events wouldn't be possible without the crucial financial support from Arts Fairfax.

[01:50:52] We can't stress enough just how important continued funding for the arts is, especially at a time when everyone is vying for limited and much-needed resources. In addition to supporting artists and presenters, the funding enriches everyone's quality of life and helps to build the community of Fairfax County.

[01:51:15] Now, it's great that we have big-box venues in Fairfax County, like Woolstrap and Capital One Hall, but their ticket prices are too high for many families, and they hire mainly national artists. We have mid-sized venues like the Birchmere and Jam and Java, but smaller, more affordable, independent venues are closing down fast.

[01:51:37] Just recently, we lost Herb's Ordinary, one of the very few remaining full-time music venues in Fairfax. Now, that's where Arts Fairfax's support for non-profit and fantastic community partnerships becomes a game-changer.

[01:51:54] making sure that the arts are accessible to everyone, and hiring local talent, which we love, of course. Yes, being a musician is glamorous. Or so they say. It also means adapting to constant change.

[01:52:12] Our economic reality means fewer opportunities locally, so we often find ourselves traveling further and further to make a living. But no matter the challenge, the reward is immeasurable. There's

nothing like connecting with an audience, hearing how our music impacts their lives, seeing people connect with the music and with each other, and seeing that spark of joy that we bring.

[01:52:43] This is what drives us to keep going day after day. It's why we joined Arts Fairfax for their Fairfax Regional Artist Survey and are proud to be a part of their artist advisory group. We truly believe that the work of musicians, artists, theater folk, and writers is essential to the cultural richness of Fairfax County.

[01:53:03] We hope the findings of the survey will help create a clearer vision for supporting artists, cultural institutions, and both private and public creative spaces. This vision will ensure a more sustainable future for artists like us, so we can continue contributing to the cultural vibrancy for generations to come.

[01:53:25] Thank you so much for your time and attention and for singing along and for your continued support for the arts in Fairfax County. Thank you. Thank you very much. Very well done and a tough act to follow. So we now welcome Stuart Holt, the president and CEO of Arts Fairfax. Welcome.

[01:53:52] Thank you. Thank you, Chairman McKay and members of the Board of Supervisors. On behalf of Arts Fairfax, the local arts agency dedicated to advancing arts and cultural participation in Fairfax County, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. Before I begin, I'd like to thank Ken Avis and Lynn Varano for their testimony and their artistry.

[01:54:14] During this difficult budget year, Arts Fairfax gratefully acknowledges the funding proposed by the county executive's FY26 advertised budget. On behalf of the arts community in Fairfax County, many of whom are with us today, thank you for your support and your continued investment in the arts.

[01:54:37] Over the last 12 months at the helm of Arts Fairfax, my staff and I have met with each of you to discuss the impact of arts programs and Arts Fairfax grants in your districts, as well as the variety of arts activities that are occurring.

[01:54:52] We've hosted two arts roundtable with Supervisor Palchek and Supervisor Bierman, and we've scheduled two more with Supervisors Jimenez and Supervisor Stork. These gatherings bring art stakeholders together to create action items for a more engaged and localized arts community.

[01:55:11] We've collaborated with Fairfax County Public Schools, Neighborhood and Community Services, the Office of Commercial Revitalization, the Park Authority, and numerous private and civic entities to find new and efficient ways to better serve local arts organization and local arts.

[01:55:31] Most importantly, we have attended over hundreds of arts and cultural events across all magisterial districts. I myself have attended over 70 events, and that is because I, like all of you, believe it's important to show up and be present for our Fairfax residents so that they feel seen, heard, and supported.

[01:55:58] You know, the value of the arts and culture is often lauded for inspiring empathy, sparking joy, and improving health and well-being of our larger community. What is less known is the economic impact. This past winter, we promoted arts organizations as small businesses, partnering with Celebrate Fairfax, Visit Fairfax, and the county's Department of Economic Initiatives.

[01:56:23] In Fairfax County alone, our arts sector generates over half a billion in economic activity. activity. This information was highly valuable as Arts Fairfax traveled to Richmond to meet with state

legislators to highlight arts and cultural organizations as economic engines, benefiting not just Northern Virginia, but the Commonwealth as a whole. As Lynn and Ken mentioned, we conducted the Fairfax Regional Artist Survey with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and a private foundation. By appealing to national, state, and private funders, Arts Fairfax is working

[01:57:02] hard to make sure more county dollars can go directly to our artists and arts organizations. As Fairfax County evolves to meet its growing population, I will continue to partner with you and others in our shared commitment to the residents of our community. By showing up and doing the work, Arts Fairfax intends to be a resource generator, not a resource drain.

[01:57:30] As I and the rest of these arts supporters behind me can attest, there is no community that knows how to maximize what little we have better than the always resourceful and innovative arts community.

[01:57:49] Thank you for your time. Thank you, Stuart. Thank you, Stuart. that was excellent. Almost as good as the music. Close call. Close call. Well done.

[01:58:05] We now have Julian DePhillips, who's speaker number 33. And let me call a few others just so you're ready. I believe speaker 34, William Mack, has canceled. 35 is Amy Martin. And 36 is Carrie Leach. If I called your name, please make sure you come down close and are ready to testify like Julian did. Welcome. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and supervisors on the board.

[01:58:31] That past testimony was fantastic. My name is Julian DePhillips. I'm here on behalf of the Advisory Social Services Board. I represent Mason District on that board and serve as chair. The ASSB is a legally mandated board that interests itself in all matters pertaining to the social welfare of the people served by the Fairfax County government, monitors the formation of and implementation of social welfare programs and meets with the director of the Department of Family Services to make recommendations on policy matters.

[01:59:01] DFS has over 50 programs and services across four main divisions, adults and aging, children, youth, and families, domestic and sexual violence services, and public assistance and employment services. DFS services are often preventative and reduce the need for more costly public safety and judicial intervention.

[01:59:20] Fairfax County keeps many at-risk children and adults at home with family through its work done by DFS and its many partners. We expect an increase in demand for DFS services in 2026 across all divisions.

[01:59:37] We extend our appreciation to the Board for their continued commitment to essential human services programs, which we can see in current funding, and for the previously approved appropriation of $4.8 million of state revenue to address staffing challenges at DFS. The ASSB supports the Board's stated priority of protecting and enriching our quality of life for people, neighborhoods, and diverse communities.

[02:00:00] The proposed fiscal year 2026 budget represents a $2.9 million reduction in the DFS budget from the previous year, following a $3.6 million reduction the year before that. This year's decrease in funding is projected to eliminate 12 positions and impact services across all four DFS divisions.

[02:00:18] Services will be eliminated that support children, families, and disabled adults. An additional $6.7 million reduction is proposed to the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services, eliminating services for children and the elderly, such as the middle school after school program. DFS has taken a considered approach to applying the proposed budget reductions, focusing on cuts on vacant positions and minimizing impacts to service delivery where possible.

[02:00:43] However, any additional reductions in funding will impact essential services and should be avoided. We are concerned that reductions will increase unplanned expenses in other areas, such as emergency response for home situations that fully funded DFS services could have addressed. DFS is dependent on a number of federal funding sources as well administered through agencies such as HHS and it manages the eligibility of recipients for federal funds programs like Medicaid, SNAP and TANF. The board should consider the potential impact of disruption of federal disbursements on the health and welfare of county residents as well as on the capacity of

[02:01:19] DFS to deliver services. We ask the board to identify some funding sources or other means of addressing short-term impacts for our most vulnerable residents reliant on these programs. We again thank the Board of Supervisors for prioritizing the welfare of our county's residents and request that the approved fiscal year 2026 budget do the following: avoid further cuts to DFS funding, avoid tax increases that impact those least able to afford it, continue prioritizing investments in affordable housing, and continue spending to support county child care services regardless of department. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[02:01:56] We are now on speaker number 34. I'm told it's canceled. William Mack, 35, is Amy Martin, to be followed by Carrie Leach and Sue Thomas. Welcome. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Amy Martin. I am speaking on behalf of the Friends of Greenspring, known by many as Frogs.

[02:02:18] We collaborate with the Fair Parks Alliance. Some of those you've heard from before today, the various park supporting groups. We are an informal coalition of literally grassroots organizations.

[02:02:38] We volunteer thousands of hours and raise thousands of dollars to support the parks and, in some cases, an entire watershed. First of all, thank you to all of you who are holding and attending these hearings.

[02:02:55] This has been a horrible year. You are facing horrendous choices, and it's been exasperated by the current crisis. More than ever, we have more needs and fewer resources.

[02:03:15] But we want to thank you for the past two years. You have begun bringing back some of the funding to the underfunded parks, and we welcome this year the augmentation of the salaries for the full-time workers.

[02:03:33] We hope that maybe the part-timers who are actually a large part and a very important part of the park employees will have their term next year. Given the circumstances, we're not asking for an increase in funding, but we're asking for proportional sacrifices.

[02:03:57] The park's budget is already a minuscule part of your budget. It's only a sliver, 0.65% of the budget. But it's slated to take 3.8% of the proposed cuts, almost six times its share.

[02:04:19] The previous speakers spoke to some of those, the invasive plant, invasive management, the arborists, the trail maintenance. So we're asking you not to make the parks take a larger share of the

budget cuts than is already part of their proportion of the budget.

[02:04:47] Why is this important? It's because the parks have a direct and indirect benefit for every single person living in this county. Parks bring cleaner air, more moderate climate, and control of stormwater.

[02:05:05] This is on top of the direct benefits, the physical and mental health. I heard impoverished mothers of disabled children talk about how taking their children to walk in the park is the only relief that they have.

[02:05:22] I've seen hundreds and hundreds of people going around the circle at Green Spring Gardens every day just to get out and breathe some fresh air. Secondly, these people that are being supported are being supported by a system that is a live system.

[02:05:47] They're living, and if you don't take care of these systems, they will die. Whether it's a botanical garden, a native wetland, or a historic structure, it can't be mothballed like a battleship.

[02:06:03] Gardens wither and fill with weeds. Trees are strangled by vines. String banks collapse, and the historic roof leaks and ruins the inside of that 400-year-old structure.

[02:06:22] You don't want to lose this county investment. The county has invested years of knowledge, work, and money. We need to protect this resource, not only for itself, but for the benefit of every single member of Fairfax County.

[02:06:42] Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 36 is Carrie Leach here. Carrie Leach present. Let's see Carrie Leach. Sue Thomas. And following Sue Thomas will be Anika Rahman and Jill Norcross. Welcome.

[02:07:06] Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Sue Thomas. I am 66 years old, and my husband and I moved to Clifton in 2015. I felt compelled to come to this meeting today to share my personal testimony and how strongly I feel about the need to keep the ambulance service in our community. When we moved here, I was already three years into an unexpected and difficult health journey. At 53, I suffered a Widowmaker heart attack, something that struck me completely out of the blue and changed my life

[02:07:45] forever. In the first year after that heart attack, I was hospitalized seven times as doctors worked to understand what was happening. Eventually, I was diagnosed with a rare genetic heart disease. Since then, I've done my best to manage through medication and lifestyle changes. In November of 2022, I had a medical emergency that reminded me just how vital our local ambulance service truly is. Around 4 a.m. one morning, I got up, walked into the bathroom, and fainted. By the grace of

[02:08:22] God, my husband heard me fall and immediately called 911. The ambulance and paramedics arrived within minutes. When they got to me, I was semi-conscious, and my blood pressure had dropped to a critically low level. The EMTs worked quickly and carefully to stabilize me. They were calm, they were focused, and they clearly knew exactly what to do. I was scared, but I also remember feeling like I was in very capable and compassionate hands. Once it was safe, they transported me to

[02:08:56] Fairfax Hospital for further care. If that ambulance team hadn't arrived when they did, I truly believe I would not have survived. That service didn't just help me. It saved my life.

[02:09:13] And I know I'm not the only one who can say this. I understand that budgets are tight and tough decisions have to be made. But I believe the emergency services, like the Ambling Service in Clifton, are something that a community like ours simply cannot afford to lose.

[02:09:35] Please don't take away this essential service. Lives depend on it. Mine did. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you. Speaker number 38 is Anika Rahman to be followed by Jill Norcross and Ishwari Gamiri. Welcome. Thank you. Good evening, Chairman McKay and the Board of Members of Supervisors. My name is Anika Rahman and I am the Fairfax Director for Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance, also known as Navaha. I've always worked in Fairfax, but I cannot afford to live here like so many. It's the same story over and over again with my

[02:10:13] friends and my peers who simply do not have the same asset of housing that our parents had. And it's hard and terrible to see that so many others than the younger generation are slipping further away from that dream. I believe Fairfax can and should be a place where a community where everyone has access to safe, stable, and affordable housing neighborhoods where they can strive.

[02:10:33] First and foremost, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the Board of West's commitment to affordable housing. Your proposal for an additional one quarter penny amounts to $8.49 million is a critical step towards achieving the county's goal in delivering at least 10,000 affordable housing units by 2034.

[02:10:50] With this allocation, the county's total investment of one quarter penny or $42.44 million reflects meaningful progress and a deep commitment to addressing the region's growing housing needs. We also want to thank you for the thoughtful approach in the meal tax proposal. This measure reflects a balanced effort to generate much-needed revenue while easing the burden of homeowners. We appreciate the allocation of 3.3 million dollars toward the repurposing of extended-state hotel in the Fair Ridge Hotel, Fair Ridge Family Shelter. This initiative represents an important lifeline for families to experience homelessness and demonstrates a compassionate solution approach to human

[02:11:26] services. As the county continues to navigate these complex physical challenges, we respectfully ask that you remain attentive to the vital role that Human Services play in supporting our most vulnerable residents. Any potential custody programs could have lasting impacts on individuals and families who rely on these residential supports. This incremental investment will allow Fairfax County to advance several active development and preservation projects, including those at Innovation Station, East County, Chantilly Library, and the Stone Ridge Park and Ridge site. It will also support preservation efforts like Stone Gate Village and prepare for redevelopment initiatives such as the

[02:12:02] Crescent Apartments. Reaching the county's 10,000-year bike 2034 will ultimately require sustained funding estimated at $25 million annually or the two pennies of the real estate tax rate. We encourage the board to explore opportunities through quarterly budget reviews, one-time funding balance, and new revenue options to gradually integrate this level of support in the baseline budget. Navaja deeply appreciates your leadership and vision. We look forward to continuing our partnership in building our Fairfax where every resident has access to safe sustainable stable and affordable housing thank you for opportunity to share these reflections and your time today thank you

[02:12:40] speaker number 39 is Jill Norcross to be followed by Ishwari Gamiri and Tirtha Joshi welcome thank you thank you members of the Board of Supervisors my name is Jill Norcross I am a homeowner and resident of the Hunter Mill district I work to support affordable housing in my day job and I'm a member a hack I just want to frame my comments on three themes really my appreciation for your investments in housing recognition of Fairfax County residents who are feeling endangered and also to make a plea for in creative incentives

[02:13:19] for additional affordable housing investments or additional affordable housing development so first thank you for the investments in the proposed quarter additional quarter penny of the real estate tax and want to emphasize really the need for the goal of 2 cents of the property tax by 2027 as a new baseline investment to meet our goals of 10,000 new affordable homes we commend you for continuing your quarterly reviews and the allocation of surplus cash to meet the financing needs of board approved projects thank you also for considering new revenue options such as the full 4% of the meals tax to help meet our investments in housing and human services I also want to recognize

[02:13:58] and the care and caution that the county is taking as you evaluate impacts of the reduction in federal spending our county's ability to pivot and remain flexible to support the safety net is vital as we talk about dollars and pennies and tax rates and units I want to lift up the real reason that we're all working so hard on these housing goals is the need to support people and especially our endangered residents in Fairfax County we appreciate funding for the new family homeless shelter and additional shelter beds the vouchers that are tied with supportive services and partnership with state agencies but

[02:14:36] we also want to lift up our immigrant neighbors as they are facing real fears due to deportations we support our federal workers and contractors whose livelihoods have been endangered by federal cuts our need to keep people safe and stably housed is paramount as we all work toward the county's one Fairfax policy you know the severe cuts in federal spending we're going to affect all of us especially here in this region but we know the burdens will be borne by our most vulnerable populations with the lowest incomes and lack of savings so please consider how human service cuts will impact these groups third in this uncertain time of financial constraints really gives the

[02:15:15] county the opportunity to be creative and how you use low or no cost incentives for developers to build affordable housing the county has a statewide authority to plan to reduce development costs and expedite development processes to incentivize production in a resource constrained environment changes to impact fees zoning and fast-track development approvals can yield low cost and real results in conjunction with your financial investments so thank you again for your continued leadership on housing investments protecting residents who are endangered, and finally providing incentives for new tools to

[02:15:51] expedite affordable housing development. Thank you. Speaker number 40 is Ishwari Gamiri, to be followed by Tirtha Josie and Gita Sharma. Welcome. I'm a little bit nervous, but I will try my best. Good evening, Chairman and member of the board.

[02:16:14] My name is Ishwari Gamiri, and I am a resident of the Springfield and proud member of SEIU for the past seven years I have been working at the ECC as a full-time educators and infant room in addition to my role at ECC I also work early in the morning private day care center at home I care to elderly parents both of them who are disabled and my two children's my husband working long hours so he can manage most of the caregiving responsibilities today I would like to share my personal experience and the educator and discuss the important equity of the

[02:16:52] in our field i wanted to express my gratitude to form your board effort and initiating to pay compression study at ncs two years ago i received the moderate salary increase which acknowledged my years of experience in early childhood education while i appreciate that adjustment that reality is two of the children's income is still insufficient to support my family since the county executive budget presentation of my family and co-workers have been living with the constant

[02:17:27] worry and jobless and the uncertainty surrounding of the position should be the eccb prioritize this with this the daily concern my colleagues and i continue show up each day fully committed prioritizing the well-being in the children in our care at ECC many of our colleagues permanently women are navigating similar challenges and we are dreaming deeply committed to our work our dedication isn't driven by financial gain it's pulling by the genuine passion for our early childhood education we

[02:18:03] cherish and relationships we have built with the children's and our families followed our educators. Our team is made of the diverse cultures and backgrounds, reflecting in the rich multicultural fabric and the Fairfax County.

[02:18:19] Noticeably, 87% of our early childhood educators are women of Carlos. The diversity enhance our ability to connect with the support of communities we serve. The purpose of the reflection force that theatres disabled many up into roles may not align with our specialized education in early childhood education.

[02:18:42] Moreover, the county currently lacks 40 equivalent positions to accommodations such as the transaction. Prioritizing the centers could also have an unintended consequences for our families, meaning parents, and particularly women employed by the county really on our service.

[02:19:01] Without accessible child care, they might not complete to leave their position to care for their children, potentially reducing the participant of the women in our county workforce. In my personal experience working two jobs, my county job has always been prioritized.

[02:19:18] Priority, there's a clear difference between the county work is the respect families value and the benefits are excellent. This is the job where I want to be retired from. Since the budget proposal have been the living in, or sentiently all my 37 colleagues have.

[02:19:37] NCS leadership and the county didn't ask for the input to explore the ways to save ECC. We only found we were being cut out the county executive presentation budget, presented the budget.

[02:19:53] The same evening, the agency director told us our job were at Rex. I understand we are living at an hour or sentiently, However, we are the real people, not the member of the budget line team.

[02:20:09] As a resident, a homeowner, a mother, as a committed county employee, I ask you all that stand with the working families and your workforce help us save ECC. Thank you. I want you to think about that again. Thank you. Thank you.

[02:20:24] We are on speaker number 41, Tertha Joshi, to be followed by Gita Sharma, I'm sorry, and Michael Newman. Welcome. Good afternoon, Chairman and Board Supervisors.

[02:20:43] My name is Tirtha Josie, and I'm a teacher at the Fairfax County Child Care Center and resident of the Fairfax Department District. And I'm here today to urge you to support saving our organization and maintaining ECC as a county-operated program.

[02:21:00] This child care center is very essential for the county employees because the center provides exceptionally safe and nurturing environments and high-quality early childhood learning experiences for their little ones, which helps children to be socially, emotionally independent and learn and grow in a safe environment.

[02:21:21] Many families go to work for Fairfax County residents worry-free, knowing that their children are in safe and experienced hands. Thinking about eliminating this organization will negatively impact the

family and the children. When I joined ACC three and a half years ago, after working for a decade as a lead teacher in a private daycare center, I was amazed to see the group of dedicated teachers and their passion to work with the children.

[02:21:50] I saw and felt their love towards the work they do every day in every classroom I walked into and found myself in the place where I always imagined wanting to be and retire from. One of the things, among many, I enjoy working here is the teamwork.

[02:22:09] Our whole center is a single unit. My supervisors have unmasked experiences and value every individual for who they are and guide us every day to bring the best out of us, which helps me and my co-worker to give our best to the family and children every single day.

[02:22:28] Additionally, we get regular research-based training to enhance our and refresh our knowledge. Further, eliminating ECC means hurting the minority workforce, especially women of color. And ECC is the best example of the diversity and equity in Fairfax County, which glorifies the county's vision and mission.

[02:22:51] Senior management said that they will have a job for us, but I am very unaware what kind of job I will be placed into. I came to work in this place because I love working with the children. I love the philosophy of the workplace. I understand that budgetary constraints lead to this kind of decision.

[02:23:09] But as a homeowner, a taxpayer, and a member of the ACIU, I strongly oppose this decision to eliminate the ECC as a county-operated program. This is heartbreaking for me and my co-workers to hear a sudden announcement about displacing of our children and staff.

[02:23:28] I urge you to find ways to raise your cost and give us a chance. We will definitely work together to find ways that will allow us to maintain this nationally accredited child care center and expand the services for more workers and community. Thank you so much. Thank you for your time.

[02:23:44] Thank you. Speaker number 42 is Gita Sharma. Is Gita Sharma here? Okay. To be followed by 43, Michael Newman. 44, Meera Cohen. If I called your name, please come down close and be ready to testify. Welcome.

[02:24:01] Good afternoon, Chairman and Board of Members. Thank you for giving me a chance to speak today. My name is Geeta Sharma, and I have been a teacher at the Fairfax County Employee Child Care Center since 2022. When I joined the ECCC, I found that the center provides a high-quality early childhood program that helps to foster growth, learning, and socialization for these young children.

[02:24:26] I have worked in another center, and I never found a center like this quality of the ECCC. All the teachers here are dedicated to the field of early childhood education and dedicated to the children and families.

[02:24:41] Because of our low ratio and more teachers with experience, we can give each child the attention they teach up and can help children with behavioral challenges, receive the care and education they needed. Also, we have an on-site kitchen that serves the nutritious meals for the children, so the parents don't have to worry about their children's meals.

[02:25:05] We have good relationships with families, so we can work together as a team to meet each children's education as needed. ECCC is like a beehive. We are all working hard together and making sweet memories with these young children and families.

[02:25:24] I left my job at the private provider nearby my home to join ECCC for a better opportunity to do what I love and be valued as an early childhood educator, receiving fair pay and benefits.

[02:25:42] But when I hear about the proposal of closing the center due to the budgetary concern, I was shocked and I felt like thunder hit me. I couldn't sleep for so many nights. Now I am worried I will be put in another position that is not suited for my skill and education.

[02:26:03] And I will not be able to work with the children doing what I love. I'm also worried about these children who we form bond with having their teachers taken away. And I worry about the parents not having the support they need to continue their jobs knowing their children are taken care of by the teachers they trust.

[02:26:26] I'm so proud to be able to serve these children and their parents who work hard serving our community. And I ask that you allow the center to be continued as a country-operated program. Thank you. Thank you for hearing my opinion and request. Thank you so much.

[02:26:41] Thank you. We're on speaker number 43, Michael Newman. Is Michael Newman here? To be followed by Mira Cohen, Kendall McGibbon. If I called your name, please come on down. Welcome. Hey, Mr. Chairman, could I yield my three minutes and my wife who's right behind me, number 44, full six minutes?

[02:27:01] Sure. Okay, thank you. And your wife is Mira Cohen, correct? Yes, that's right. Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for that courtesy. Good afternoon. My name is Mira Cohen.

[02:27:18] My son, Rami, is a student at College Steps at NVCC. Rami himself spoke at the Janesville Town Hall meeting in favor of his program. His ability to speak clearly and eloquently in front of a group of strangers is a testament to the tremendous power of this post-secondary program for youth on the spectrum.

[02:27:42] I want first to really express a heartfelt thank you to Fairfax County and its leaders. for understanding the extent to which it allows young people with autism to earn college degrees. A key indicator for employment in Fairfax County, as you know, Fairfax County is one of the most educated counties in the country, with 65% of residents, 25 and older, holding college degrees, in comparison with about 36% in the nation at large.

[02:28:17] This means that in Fairfax County, college education means a lot, and most jobs that afford independence really require this level of education. We all know that Fairfax County must make difficult and significant budget cuts.

[02:28:38] Times are hard and likely about to get harder. We also know that the entire category of post-secondary education programs for people with disabilities has been slated to be cut, not reduced, cut.

[02:28:54] Sixty-eight young people countywide are currently enrolled in this program. Instead, on April 16th, we were told we can apply for up to $10,000 in funding for alternative programs versus the 2024 funding of $18,000 from the county to cover a full academic year of college steps.

[02:29:13] In case you aren't aware, just to let you know, College Steps offers each student an individualized plan including one-to-one academic support, one-to-one peer mentorship, one-to-one pre-employment training and support, one-to-one career counseling, one-to-one support navigating a complex campus environment, independent living skills, and social engagement and support.

[02:29:40] These wraparound services are offered at the student's campus, providing a safe environment, eliminating additional extensive transportation costs, and helping students integrate into the college environment.

[02:29:56] None of the other programs, either alone or even combined, comes close to offering the stability, support, and job and independent living training of one College Steps program.

[02:30:11] Our family values the stability and support College Steps offers so much that we suggested simply utilizing the 10K we were being offered for other programs for the College Steps program. Rather than piecing together limited programs from across the county, this would come at an additional cost to our family.

[02:30:35] We were told we can't, but we can submit by May 15th a request to utilize a program similar to, but different from, College Steps. The reality is there is no other program. This really is it.

[02:30:53] On April 11th, in response to an email from Barbara Wadley Young, Deputy Director, Clinical Operations CSB, District Supervisor Bierman asked the following, what is, quote, the budgetary impact of allowing someone like Ms. Cohen and Mr. Newman's son Rami to utilize self-directed services funding toward completing the College Steps program rather than towards another program?

[02:31:19] If the budgetary impact is neutral, why would we not allow it to happen? On April 21, Supervisor Bierman wrote back to state that he had been in contact with CSB leadership and, quote, the CSB believes that the College Steps program, even if the CSB allowed families to cover the difference in cost, will not exist by July of this year, which is why the CSB has been so reluctant to partially grandfather in current families.

[02:31:48] Supervisor Behrman wisely suggested I contact College Steps to determine whether the program would still exist. I did. The Director of Admissions wrote me back to state, College Steps is not closing. We will continue to provide quality support for our students.

[02:32:07] Additionally, Supervisor Behrman stated in the same email, quote, in the view of the CSB, it signed up to fund College Steps as part of the suite of programming and self-directed services based on a one-to-one model, but they change to support a small group model.

[02:32:24] This just isn't true. Navigating the system is hard enough for special needs families. This scenario with its truncated timeline and mis-messaging from the CSB has just created extra strain for people already under serious stress.

[02:32:44] This afternoon, I urge you to support reason and compassion for families with special needs by backing secondary programs just at the same level the other programs are funded, nothing more than anyone else.

[02:33:01] I urge you to help give our eligible young people on the autism spectrum an opportunity to thrive in our highly educated and, as we know, very priced county. Thank you. Thank you.

[02:33:17] We are now on speaker number 45, Kendall McGibbon. Kendall McGibbon. Okay. To be followed by Wallace Witt and Jonah Lee. Chairman McKay and other members of the board, good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to make some brief comments, and I will be brief.

[02:33:45] My name is Kendall McGiven. I'm 68 years old, retired, and a long-time 25-year resident of the Clifton, Virginia community. I'm here today as a concerned resident to urge you to keep our Clifton

Ambulance No. 416 stationed in our small community.

[02:34:05] We depend on this ambulance every day to provide timely emergency services for our residents. The proposed budget cuts threaten to remove this vital service, and I believe this decision would compromise the safety and the well-being of our community and may even result at putting lives at risk.

[02:34:28] I, like others, have experienced the benefit of having a local ambulance. Last September on a Friday night, my wife and I were leaving dinner about 8 o'clock in the night from a local restaurant in Clifton. As we were walking across the parking lot to our car, it was dark.

[02:34:48] As I approached my car, I was struck and bitten by a large, venomous copperhead snake. The pain and the swelling and the nausea was immediate. And never having been bitten by a snake before, I was almost in a state of shock because I didn't really know how bad is this going to be.

[02:35:05] My wife, who was with me, was also panicked a little bit, was, how is she going to drive me in this state to the hospital? Well, fortunately, in the town of Clifton, in fact, right across the street was an ambulance. They came right over, and within 30 minutes, I was in the ER at the Inova Hospital in Fairfax getting treatment.

[02:35:28] This situation could have had a much worse outcome and been much more traumatic if that ambulance had not been there. If I had to lay around and wait for 20 or 30 minutes as my legs swelled and the redness spread up the leg, it would have been much more traumatic.

[02:35:46] However, this isn't just my story. This is a reality for anyone in Clifton who has a heart attack, a stroke, a fall, or any other emergency. Based on this, I would just like to leave you with three thoughts that hopefully you could remember and use in reevaluating this decision.

[02:36:08] First, as you've heard from others, Clifton is a unique community. It's remote, it's rural, and it's really hard to move about. The roads out there are small, winding, old country roads, and it's slow to move about.

[02:36:26] So if an ambulance had to come in there from outside of the community, it could take a lengthy period of time. Fortunately, we have an ambulance there today, which ensures rapid response times, which can mean the difference between life and death.

[02:36:43] When an emergency strikes, every second counts, especially in that rural area. Second, our area has an aging and elderly population. This makes us and these folks much more vulnerable to strokes, heart attacks, falls, and other emergencies.

[02:37:04] By removing this ambulance, you put that community, the vulnerable folks out there, at a much higher risk. And thirdly and lastly, I do understand the need to prioritize a budget and make a budget cut.

[02:37:20] But I simply believe that public safety must come first. Certainly, given the size and scope of the large and ever-growing Fairfax County budget, there's got to be other efficiencies or other areas of waste that could be taken out to allow the ambulance in Clifton to remain. Thank you. This isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. And we're not asking for anything new. We're just asking to keep what we have. So in conclusion, hopefully you can reconsider that decision and put the priority of our people first. Thank you. Thank you very

[02:37:55] much. We're on Speaker 46, Wallace Witt, to be followed by Jonah Lee and Brenda Richardson. Welcome. Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm only afforded three minutes to address a budget that spans over 400 pages, so I'll get right to it. My name is Wallace Witt, and I've been a resident of Fairfax County since August of 2023. My wife and I purchased our home in May of that year. We love the area, and we love our home. However, in just two years, we've experienced a 35% increase in property taxes due to a combination of the rise

[02:38:31] property values and an increase in the county imposed tax rate. Based on the FY26 budget plan, property taxes are forecast to increase by another $247 million after accounting for yet another proposed tax rate increase. This accounts for nearly all of the $255 million projected revenue increase for the general fund in 2026, an increase of 4.7 percent from last year, which is over the forecast rate of inflation of 2.2 percent. Over the last few years, property taxes have steadily increased from just over $3 billion in revenue in 2022 to a projected $3.8 billion in the 2026 budget.

[02:39:06] This is a cumulative increase of 26% over the last four years and has more than doubled the roughly 12.8% cumulative inflation rate over that same period. Furthermore, the property taxes have continued to increase as a percentage of total revenue for the county from 64% according to the 2022 actuals to nearly 67% in the proposed 2026 budget.

[02:39:27] Since 2021, homeowners and would-be aspiring homebuyers have been forced to contend with rising home prices, interest rates, overall costs due to inflation, and now an ever-growing tax burden. Home prices are about as unaffordable as they've ever been, and the decision of the county to continue to raise property taxes will only put homeownership out of the reach of even more residents.

[02:39:47] The budget proposal recommends a spending increase of $243 million, or roughly 4.4%, over 2025, again an increase over and above the forecast rate of inflation. $118 million of this increase to support the Fairfax County Public Schools for an increase of 4.6%.

[02:40:02] The school system that's seen its budget grow by 23% since FY22, but has struggled to bring test scores for students back to pre-pandemic levels. According to the approved 2019 budget, the cost per student was approximately $15,000. The 2025 cost per student is about $21,000.

[02:40:18] If fully funded, the 2026 FCPS budget proposal asked for a further cost per student increase of about $22,000 total cost. Many private schools in the area charge significantly less than this per student. I don't even have time to get into proposed capital improvement programs other than to say that the issuance of hundreds of millions of dollars in municipal bonds through 2030 to fund these programs is guaranteed to result in an even greater tax burden on county residents in the coming years.

[02:40:47] It's telling that despite the acknowledgement of taxpayer fatigue, the county's solution is to present a budget with a $255 million spending increase and a measly $60 million in reductions as an offset. It's time to make hard choices. Taxpayers are overwhelmed, and they must demand greater accountability from their local government.

[02:41:03] I strongly and respectfully urge the board to reconsider this budget proposal and to carefully reassess the additional financial burden being placed once again upon the hardworking residents of Fairfax County. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 47 is Jonah Lee. Is Jonah Lee here? Are you Jonah Lee? Okay. Speaker number 47 to be followed by Brenda Richardson. Welcome. Hello, Chairman and members of the board. Thank you for allowing me to present here today. Community service and

emergency preparedness are vital to building strong, resilient communities. In times of need, preparedness

[02:41:43] and service can mean the difference between chaos and stability, making these efforts essential for a thriving and secure community. My name is Jonah Lee, and I am a sophomore at George C. Marshall High School and a certified member of the Community Emergency Response Team, CERT. Having completed my training in December 2023 with CERT Team 186. Initially, I joined CERT as an intriguing activity to do with my dad. Coming out of COVID, I have to admit that control over an emergency situation reassured me. Beyond the basic CERT training, I also took CERT Advanced First Aid. Through my

[02:42:22] through CERT training, I learned how to respond to both small-scale disasters and large-scale disasters, and I've gotten practice in life-segmenting techniques. I've participated in high-stress search and rescue drills that simulated real emergencies, allowing us to practice patient assessment and teamwork in chaotic environments. CERT has given me a strong sense of purpose.

[02:42:47] It showed me that people from all neighborhoods, districts, and cities can come together to learn these skills to assist during emergencies. The camaraderie among CERT members is inspiring. We are all working toward a common goal of making our county safer. My interactions with current CERT leaders have shown me the lasting impact of a lifelong commitment to community service and safety. And I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to join programs like CERT because the return on investment goes beyond what can be calculated. I strongly encourage the Fairfax

[02:43:24] County Board to continue supporting the CERT program. The skills taught in CERT training are invaluable and the program fosters a cultural preparedness that makes Fairfax safer and stronger. Investing in CERT means investing in the resilience and well-being of our citizens, encouraging a culture of service within our youth, and ensuring we are ready to face any emergency together going forward in the future. Thank you. Thank you very much. Well done. Thank

[02:43:57] you very much uh speaker number 48 is brenda richardson to be followed by speaker number 49 uh someone named penny gross and speaker number 50 maria isabel balavane welcome thank you good evening chairman and members of the board my name is brenda richardson i'm the executive director for service source headquartered in oakton virginia i am joined by pia who attends the Enconia Senior Center and will share a brief comment following mine. Thank you for the

[02:44:35] opportunity to share our concerns regarding the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services or NCS fiscal year 26 advertised budget for supportive and inclusion services at the county's 14 senior centers and the virtual center for older adults. The NCS funding supports a long-term contract with servicers that we have successfully implemented for 10 years. A 50% funding cut will limit the availability of our specialized services, and risk the well-being of seniors and the families in our community.

[02:45:07] As you are aware, ServiceLOS has a long history of working with Fairfax County to serve county residents. To address the needs of our aging population, we expanded the work together in 2015 to provide specialized services at county's 14 senior centers.

[02:45:25] We also opened the Wellness Center for Older Adults in Fairfax in 2022. The need for case management and therapeutic services at senior centers continues to grow, and we now serve well over

1,000 older adults annually. A budget cut of 50% will significantly reduce our already limited staffing of social workers and recreational therapists who support all 14 senior centers, and the staff who we are able to retain will have to further divide their time between all locations.

[02:45:58] NCS has proposed that the county cover the reduced supports, but recognize that they cannot support residents at the current level. With ServiceSource as the in-house service provider, seniors attend the centers with confidence they will have access to case management and be able to actively participate in activities including lunch, recreation, art, fitness, field trips, and social events.

[02:46:23] The adaptation, modifications, and resource linkages we provide are especially important to seniors who may have or may develop physical or cognitive disabilities. Without our specialized services, seniors may no longer come to the centers, resulting in increased social isolation, greater health risk, and need for expensive facility-based institutional care.

[02:46:49] Government programs and community resources can be difficult to navigate for seniors and their families. Our staff provide guidance and referrals related to housing, transportation, and medical concerns. We also conduct cognitive assessments and depression screenings and provide additional resources as needed.

[02:47:07] Importantly, we assist with the transition of seniors along the continuum of care when we identify a higher level of care as needed. We recognize it is a challenging time for the county's budget, and we are concerned the cuts may disproportionately impact older adults and disabled citizens in our community.

[02:47:28] As final decisions are made, we ask the board to be mindful of the importance of these supportive programs that are highly valued in our community. We are committed to working with the board and NCS to address budget constraints and maximize supportive and inclusive services for seniors.

[02:47:45] Thank you. And Paya, can you share a little bit about how Service Source has supported you? Chairman, sir, and ladies and gentlemen on the board, I am here to represent the case for a group that keeps continually changing.

[02:48:16] Due to various reasons, we are a very different group.

[02:48:21] I attend Lincolnia Senior Center, and the group that I am in is so diverse and so different in size, ethnicity, religion, marital status, family status, and whether they have anybody to support them, not.

[02:48:58] But the most common factor that relates to all of us is that we are in a deteriorating state of memory and mental agility.

[02:49:18] The institution that I attend is run by the neighborhood and community services. They are hard pressed for time to attend to the varied needs of the group they have.

[02:49:47] We are so different that each is a case study and each has very little time to be slow walking anything. And we are so different that no one size fits all.

[02:50:16] The neighborhood and community services personnel who look after the basic needs of the place are not competent to meet the emotional and social needs of the group that keeps changing daily.

[02:50:46] We are each a case study. So we may not have all the support we need in the house that we come from.

[02:51:07] Some of us will be childless, unmarried, separated, but everybody has a problem.

[02:51:30] And so far, we have been supported, the NCS personnel have been supported by members of the service source establishment.

[02:51:47] And their service to us has been discontinued for some time, a few months now, and we have nowhere to turn to explain our situation, to find the resources that may be needed and create new interests that will keep us mentally and socially active.

[02:52:32] thank you thank you thank you thank you very much thank you thank you very much and our next speaker is speaker number 49 penny gross to be followed by maria isabel balavane and brena diamantes if i called your name uh please come on down uh close so you're ready to testify and this is a treat

[02:53:08] to welcome Penny Gross back to the board auditorium. Mr. Chairman and members of the board, my name is Penny Gross, and I'm a Mason District resident.

[02:53:28] The proposal to reduce funding for the free summer concert series by $136,000 is extremely disappointing, and I urge you to reconsider this proposed action. The reduction would limit the number of shows to a maximum, maximum of eight performances per magisterial district. I dare say if I were still on this board this proposal would not have seen the light of day.

[02:53:58] Here's a little summer concert history. The Newton Edwards Amphitheater at Mason District Park hosted its first regular summer concert series in 1991. It was a short series but rapidly grew to become the most popular in the county. Today we We present 29 concerts a summer, not including the Saturday morning children's shows, and another 10 international concerts at the Ossian Hall Park.

[02:54:33] In an average summer, our evening concerts entertain thousands of people. Our youngest attendees are infants. Our oldest patron passed away earlier this month at the age of 109. We maintain a donation box that has collected nearly $16,000.

[02:54:53] In just the past four concert seasons, folks just dropped their dollars into the boxes they leave. Additionally, our concerts are supported by revenue from the monopole in the park. That was my commitment to the community in 1996, when a monopole was proposed, And neighbors said, we won't oppose the monopole, but the revenues need to support Mason District Park and the concerts.

[02:55:24] I think that was my first month on the Board of Supervisors and my first big community kerfuffle. I worked with surrounding neighbors and the Park Authority to finalize the agreement. And that arrangement has been in place for almost 30 years.

[02:55:41] I think the summer entertainment series is the best thing we do as community, and over time, many supervisors have agreed with me. In 1996, most districts did not have a summer concert series, but looked to the Mason District Park concerts as a template.

[02:56:00] It's free. It's close to home. You can come as you are. There's free parking. You can bring the family and friends and neighbors and a picnic. And you can enjoy live, professional, musical entertainment from a variety of local, national, and international performers.

[02:56:19] We are living in perilous times when the arts, culture, history, and our treasured democracy are under attack from our own federal government. Fairfax County must continue to support free live entertainment for its residents via a robust summer community concert program for our beloved parks.

[02:56:42] Please do not reduce the funding for our summer concerts. Thank you. Thank you very much, Penny. Thank you very much, Penny. And we're now on speaker number 50, Maria Isabel Balivane.

[02:56:59] Are you here? Okay, great. And Brenna Diamantes will be next. Welcome. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and Board Supervisors. That's a tough act to follow.

[02:57:16] My name is Maria Isabel Ballivian, and I am the Executive Director of the ACA Child Development Center, an NAEYC-accredited nonprofit program proudly serving Fairfax County families since 1967. First, I want to sincerely thank this board for its long-standing support and commitment to early childhood education and to programs like ours.

[02:57:41] Over the years, your leadership has demonstrated a clear understanding that investing in young children, particularly those from vulnerable communities, is foundational to a thriving, inclusive Fairfax. I also want to acknowledge how challenging it is to make financial decisions in today's economic climate.

[02:58:05] Balancing limited resources while addressing growing needs is not an easy task. We recognize the pressures you face, and we appreciate the thoughtful approach this board has historically taken to protect critical services.

[02:58:21] History has shown us that when Fairfax County puts protections in place for its most vulnerable, our children, working families, and those facing economic hardships, the entire community benefits.

[02:58:36] Stronger child systems reduce future costs in education, social services, and public safety, while fostering a healthier and more productive workforce. At ACA, we see this every day.

[02:58:52] Despite rising operational costs, workforce challenges, and the fears many immigrant families face, we continue to provide high-quality early education to over 200 children. However, we are at a tipping point.

[02:59:09] Without sustained investment, programs like ours that provide foundational support for school readiness and economic stability cannot continue to bridge the growing gap alone. I urge you to continue Fairfax County legacy of smart, compassionate governance by ensuring that early childhood education remains a priority in this budget.

[02:59:34] Supporting young children and those who educate them is not just the right thing to do. It's a proven strategy for long-term community success. A recent Virginia Early Childhood Foundation poll confirms this bipartisan priority, with 9 out of 10 voters supporting increased access to and funding for high-quality early childhood education services in the D.C. metro area, which includes Northern Virginia.

[03:00:04] Thank you for your dedication and for always keeping Fairfax County youngest residents at the heart of what you do. Thanks. Thank you. Our next speaker is Brenna Diamantes, and I'm going to call 52 and 53, but I hear they've canceled Jenny Chambi and Kay Bieber.

[03:00:24] If I'm incorrect, please let me know that. And then this speaker will be followed by Sue Marina. Welcome. Hi. Good afternoon, chair members and the board of supervisors.

[03:00:41] My name is Brenna Diamantes. I'm an early childhood educator and advocate, and I'm here today to urge you to invest in the future for our community by increasing funding for early childhood

education. We are facing a crisis. Early childhood educators, who are the backbone of a child's foundational years, are leaving the field in unprecedented numbers.

[03:01:05] Why is that? Because they are underpaid, undervalued, and overburdened. These are professionals doing some of the most important work in our society. Yet, many cannot afford to stay in the profession that they love so much.

[03:01:22] Without them, there is no early childhood system. Early childhood education is the beginning of a child's educational experience. Early childhood education is education. At the same time, parents are stretched to their limits.

[03:01:40] Many working families are paying more for child care than they are for rent or for college tuition. Others simply cannot find care at all. This is not just a family issue. It's an economic issue as well. When parents cannot access affordable child care, they are forced to reduce their work hours or leave the workforce entirely.

[03:02:03] That hurts our local economy. This also hurts our children when parents are not able to give them quality and affordable child care and education. These children, our youngest citizens, are showing increasing academic, social, and behavioral needs.

[03:02:20] Yet the support systems to help them are overwhelmed or simply non-existent. Early educators often serve as the first responders for developmental and emotional concerns, but they need resources, training, and staffing to do that work well.

[03:02:37] This is why your investment matters. Funding early childhood education is not just about the numbers on a spreadsheet. It is about making sure our children are safe, supported, and ready for learning. It's about ensuring that educators can afford to stay in this profession and that families can thrive.

[03:02:54] It's about building a system that meets the needs of all children, especially those that require more and extra support. We encourage you to prioritize this in the upcoming budget. Fund early childhood education not as a luxury, but as an essential public good that it is.

[03:03:12] Early childhood education is education. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to our community's future. Please help us. Thank you so much. Next speaker is speaker number 54, Sue Mariana. Mariana? Mariana, thank you.

[03:03:34] Followed by Pat Washington and then Keo Devong Zalea. If I called your name, please come closer. Good afternoon, Chairman McKay and board members. I am Sue Mariana, president of ACA, Annandale Christian Community for Action.

[03:03:55] Now in its 58th year, a partnership with the county, providing a wide range of services for our neighbors in Annandale, Lincolnia, Bailey's Crossroads and the Colmar areas of Fairfax County. The services ACA provides are divided into two major categories. One is the Childhood Development Center which you just heard from my esteemed colleague. The other is our Human Service Ministry and I'm here to talk about that. First of all I would like to thank you for your support of ACA in the past and look forward to our continued partnership in the future. Food insecurity rates for the most

[03:04:33] severely impacted part of ACA's service areas are between 40 and 55%. ACA's Human Service Ministry works to relieve hunger and related needs with three major programs: food delivery, financial

assistance, and furniture delivery. Other initiatives that ACA supports are the Rebuilding Together program, which is a housing rehabilitation program, the Annandale Crop Hunger Walk, Shepherd Center, Neighbor to Neighbor, scholarships for students with disabilities, and our Just Neighbors program, which helps refugees.

**[03:05:11]** We need the county's continued support in this fiscal year's budget and future ones as well. The need for assistance is not going away. It's increasing daily. Recently, we received our first request for rent assistance from a federal government worker who just lost his job.

**[03:05:29]** He's now an Uber driver. The needs are real. Last year, our Family Emergency Assistance Program provided $1 million in assistance for rent, utility bills, prescriptions, and other needs in addition to our normal operating budget of $300,000.

**[03:05:47]** We did all of this with volunteer support. For 2024, our Family Emergency Assistance accounted for 70% of our operating budget, providing assistance to 347 households. Since 2020 and the pandemic, our Family Emergency Assistance Program has served 1,853 local families.

**[03:06:09]** Our food pantry volunteers deliver nutritious food and other essentials for healthy living to families and individuals in our community. Many of these neighbors do not have transportation to visit a pantry. So what we do is we get the information from the county staff and then we make the deliveries to them.

**[03:06:33]** In 2024, the food pantry assisted 1,397 families, which was up from 2023, which was up from 2022, and so on. Since 2020, our food pantry has served 6,453 local families.

**[03:06:50]** With the loss of government jobs, we anticipate a greater demand for this vitally important service. We also deliver furniture to vulnerable families. Last year, our teams delivered over 400 items to 69 households.

**[03:07:09]** Since 2020, our furniture teams have delivered to over 360 households. All of our work is accomplished by our dedicated volunteers and would not be possible without the support of Fairfax County. ACA continues to participate in Fairfax County initiatives such as prevention of hypothermia, ending homelessness, and encouraging interfaith dialogue.

**[03:07:34]** I would like to close by saying the need for assistance in our county has always been there. The need now continues, and as unemployment rises due to government layoffs, it's going to increase. Our volunteers will continue helping as many of our neighbors in need as possible.

**[03:07:51]** We ask for the county's continued support in this fiscal year's budget and future ones as well. With your continued support and our incredible volunteers, ACCA will be able to continue its critical mission. We appreciate your consideration and all the work you do for our county.

**[03:08:09]** Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Pat Washington, then followed by Keo Devong Zalaya and Maria Jose Padmore. Greetings to Chairman Jeffrey McKay and all the Board of Supervisors.

**[03:08:29]** My name is Pat Washington. I'm here speaking on behalf of my personal views and not on behalf of Fairfax County. I came to Fairfax County in 1990 with a mission to help establish new departments over the years. This department expanded significantly, and I had the privilege to take on various roles of the county.

[03:08:48] And like I said, I am retired now. During my tenure, I found a missed satisfaction in working with families in need of assistance with county services. However, my journey did not go without challenges. I've faced issues such as short staff, low wages, relative to the demanding natures of the job, and a lack of support that occasionally led to low morales.

[03:09:12] As a retiree, I continue to encounter difficulties, such as several years with no increase in my income due to budget constraints. This required me to make adjustments to my family work-life balance. I'm firmly believing that collective bargaining can address these challenges.

[03:09:31] It will empower employees to negotiate through the union and each agreement that meets their needs. Collective bargaining can improve work-life balance by allowing SEIU members, including myself, to sit down at the table to help negotiate solutions.

[03:09:48] I want to leave you all with this quote, Retention grows when your team feels like your voice matters. Thank you for your time. Thank you. Our next speaker is Kiyo Devang Zalaya, followed by Maria Jose Padmore, and then Carmen Reitz.

[03:10:05] Good evening, Chair McKay, Vice Chair Smith, and esteemed members of Board of Directors. I just want to say in my greeting, I want to say, That means, hello, how are you in Laos?

[03:10:22] My name is Kiyo Devang, but everybody knows me as Kiyo Zalaya. I serve as a director with the Fairfax County Government Employees Chapter of SCIU Virginia 512. I also work in the Department of Family Services, where my passion lies in supporting families, striving to improve their lives.

[03:10:43] Every day I witness the vision of our community members who, desperate dispute those challenges, seeks resources to better their situation. However, it's important to recognize that many county employees like myself face similar struggles.

[03:11:03] We are dedicated to our roles, yet we struggle with the same issues as the residents we serve. Access to quality health care, fair compensations, and affordable child care. The proposed budget cuts that are aimed at addressing a significant shortfall threaten to increase these challenges.

[03:11:25] Impacting not only employees, but the border community we support. If child care services are reduced, employees may be forced to stay home, leading to understaffed departments.

[03:11:42] This will result in delays in essential services like public benefits, health support, sanitizing, processing benefits. The proposed budget of 59.8 million inductions will have far huge consequences affecting the fabric of our community well-being.

[03:12:06] Also, prioritizing services like the Employee Child Care Center raises concern about accessibility and quality. Such changes would force employees to seek alternate, possibly less liable child care options, making public affected their jobs.

[03:12:26] side. Again, I urge you to consider the long-term effect of this potential budget cut. Investing in county employees is an investment in county community. With the support we need, we can continue to provide the high-quality services that Fairfax County residents rely on. Again, thank you for your time and your consideration. I trust that you will make decisions that will uphold the values of our community and support the dedicated workforce that serves it. Thank you take care thank you our next speaker is Maria Jose Padmore I've been told that

[03:13:04] the next speakers Carmen rates Ricky Brown and Lee Andrew Gaskins aren't here so the next one after Maria will be Tammy Wanda greetings chairman McKay vice chair Smith and members of the board I supposed to say I have to I only I'm speaking in behalf of my own personal views and knowing behalf of Fairfax County.

[03:13:34] That's done, so I am honored to speak again on behalf of my work family, the almost 12,000 general county employees. My union family, SEIU Virginia 512, and my family in Fairfax City, I'm speaking in behalf of all of them.

[03:13:55] My name is Maria Jose Padmore. I have proudly served as a human service assistant in Fairfax County Health Department for over 20 years. In this role, I wear many hats, Spanish interpreter, car seat safety instructor for low-income families with BDH, and a central hub connecting our community with critical resources.

[03:14:24] Yet, despite our decades of service, I remain at the same pay grade, grade 15, that when I started it back in 2004. And I'm not alone.

[03:14:42] All of our admin assistants, number two, at Fairfax County Health Department, their pay grade 13, that means two pay grades lower than me, the lowest pay grade there is, have also not received a great increase, and again, since 2004.

[03:15:02] Despite the expanding demands of our roles, still, I love what I do. I support my internal customers, doctors, nurses, speech and hearing specialists, family assistant workers, and administrators.

[03:15:21] I serve my external customers, which are all Fairfax County residents, with equal pride. Today I would like to bring to your attention Virginia State Law Title 22.1 under Education Chapter 14, Paragraph B, that reads, In implementing Subsection P of SS 22.1-253-13.2, and I have it for you if anybody wants to take a look at it.

[03:15:55] it's right here, it says relating to support services consistent with a radio of at least one nurse for 1,000 students in Fairfax County. So I want to write concerns about the proposal cuts to our school health team.

[03:16:17] These cuts will deeply impact nearly 200 dedicated school health aides and their nurses that supervise them. Many residents may not realize this, But these positions are funded through county budget, not through Fairfax County public school budgets.

[03:16:35] Yet, there is now a five-year proposal to eliminate these vital roles and replace them with LPN's positions. We believe there is better ways. We are asking Fairfax County Health Department leadership to meet and collaborate on solutions that preserve jobs, respect our experience, and continue to serve our students and their families without the costly and disruptive process of hiring and training an entire LPN workforce.

[03:17:15] Please remember, Fairfax County Health Department, you hire us, you trust us when you did. Do not remove the experience and relationship Fairfax County Health Department and school health aides have been building in the school system over decades.

[03:17:34] We are eager to share our ideas. Let us find a better way forward. Si se puede. Yes, we can. Thank you. Thank you very much. And our next speaker is number 61, Tammy Wondong.

[03:17:51] Welcome. Good evening, County Executive Mr. Hill, Chairman McKay, and the Board of Supervisors. I am Tammy Wondong, President of the Fairfax Chapter of SEIU Virginia 512.

[03:18:11] I am a Prince William County resident. I have been employed in Fairfax County for 36 years. Currently, I work in the Adult and Aging Division as a Family Safety Practitioner at the Jerry Highland Government Center.

[03:18:27] I am speaking on behalf of my own personal views and not on behalf of Fairfax County. I am here today to recognize the amazing work you have done thus far. My union, Local 512, and I want to thank you openly for funding the pay plan.

[03:18:48] We know it's workers like us general employees who assist you with keeping Fairfax County alive and thriving. You have heard from some of our members about actions that they feel strongly on, but I want to point out that we have new board members who are learning the work of our solution-driven union.

[03:19:13] Thank you again for taking the time and talking with us as we recently made visits to your offices. However, it would be remiss of me to not forget to mention our founder, Karen Conker. She is our beginning.

[03:19:30] Our members are the heartbeat of what she started many years ago. We are the surviving legacy who is moving forward to bring collective bargaining to fruition. As everyone knows throughout Fairfax County and beyond, our union met the criteria of 30% plus of signatures from our general county workers, and therefore we filed a petition to hold an election.

[03:20:02] We are the only bargaining unit. As I speak, our election is underway. Our goal forward is to win our election, and we want to win it big. We are looking forward to the future of collectively bargaining, just as our sister chapters have successfully done in Loudoun County and in the city of Richmond.

[03:20:27] I want to leave you with our motto, this union is our union. This union is our union. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. And our next speaker is Oscar DeJesus.

[03:20:44] Is Oscar DeJesus here? Ah, come on down. to be followed by Lenorel Thomas and Cater Gumas. If I called your name, please come on down close so that when it's your turn to speak, you are ready.

[03:21:01] And we are on speaker number 62, Oscar DeJesus. Welcome. Thank you. Thank you for having me. Hello. Good evening. And thank you for taking the time to hear my story and my thoughts tonight. My name is Oscar DeJesus, and I'm here, another member here with the SEIU Virginia 512.

[03:21:25] I worked with the sanitation department here in Fairfax for over three years, and I take a lot of pride in the work that I do and the difference it makes in everyday lives of each Fairfax resident. Even though many people don't tend to think of my duties I perform to be important to their everyday life, trust me, I'm pretty sure, I'm pretty sure they would reconsider if the job wasn't done.

[03:21:52] Sanitation workers provide a valuable service to the constituents that is needed for public health, and we deserve to be valued, recognized, and compensated properly for the benefits that we bring to the community that we serve. This brings true for many employees of Fairfax County, like the teachers, the janitors, the park and recreation workers, the family service and social workers who make our world go around.

[03:22:18] It could be hard to appreciate the way of life we lead every day by cutting 80 positions. That will affect every aspect of the life that we live here.

[03:22:36] Each department in this county depends on delicate balances in order to operate and lend sense of normalcy to county residents. School nurses need a certain number of health aides. Social workers can only process a certain number of cases per day.

[03:22:54] Those who work in juvenile services face safety issues if they are understaffed. In sanitation, understaffing and reduction force can literally lead to our communities turning into filth.

[03:23:10] And folks, that means your community as well, your neighbors, your friends and neighbors in your area. You can't reduce the number of people responsible for doing a job as the number of people needed to get the job.

[03:23:26] The job will increase and expect not to run into problems. I'm here today to ask you to reconsider the proposed reduction and force county employees in the upcoming budget. There's more than one way to crack an egg.

[03:23:42] And as you figure out how to make the budget work, we ask that the top concern on your mind is to figure out how to keep county workers like me in our jobs so that we can keep the streets of Fairfax safe, prosperous, and clean.

[03:24:02] Thank you so much for your time. Appreciate it. Thank you. Okay, bye. Our next speaker is speaker number 64, Lenorel Thomas, to be followed by Cater Gumas. Welcome. Good evening, Chair McKay, Vice Chair Smith, members of the Board of Supervisors and County Executive Hill. Thank you for the opportunity to speak for you tonight, not only on behalf of myself, but on behalf of the thousands of hardworking families who serve this county every day and who I proudly stand beside and represent. My name is Lenorel Thomas, and I'm honored to

[03:24:36] serve as the president of SEIU Virginia 512. I'll be brief, as I know you all had a long night yesterday. And our members have done an excellent job sharing the moment we are all in. And each of you, for the most part, have already met with our union board over the last few weeks to discuss the budget. Thank you for meeting with us, for fully funding raises for General County employees, for your continued support of collective bargaining and allowing the process to proceed, and for hopefully passing a meals tax, which we know will invest in quality services and quality jobs across Fairfax County.

[03:25:15] Tonight, I actually want to give you a front row seat to the impact county decisions have on a family. As a union leader, members call us daily and share the challenges they face, and they ask for help. They expect us to have answers and give guidance.

[03:25:32] We know the county has tough decisions to make, and each decision has an impact. In these uncertain times, it is imperative for the county to communicate with frontline employees, especially before making drastic changes in the workplace.

[03:25:48] For the last two days and since the budget was announced, we have heard from employees from ECCC, DPWES, some CSB sites, school health aides, and courts. These employees have ideas, and they are willing to share cost-saving strategies to ensure services are provided and jobs are preserved.

[03:26:12] Instead, employees and their families are dealing with fear, anger, and uncertainty. They bring this home to their families. I'm married to a Fairfax County employee. And it ultimately impacts the

community. We can do better, and we should do better.

[03:26:30] Make sure that managers are equipped to listen and educate employees on their options. We understand from our meetings with you that all RIFT employees have been reassigned. However, there are still employee classes in limbo, and it's unnecessary for employees to deal with this anxiety.

[03:26:50] We also know that these RIFTs cut vital services for mental health and homeless protections. We've heard stories of long-time employees who give their all to the community. We've heard how their work directly touches the lives of every resident, from our children's education to the health of our elderly, from emergency services to mental health programs.

[03:27:13] Let's work together to ensure that employees are adequately communicated with and given the opportunity to share their ideas. On the federal level, we see policies and changes creating ripple effects that land squarely in communities like Fairfax. Now more than ever, this board has a choice to deepen that uncertainty or to stand as a beacon of stability and partnership. Let's not miss this opportunity to lead, not just with policy, but with our heart. Let's build a future that honors the people we all

[03:27:45] serve. Thank you. Thank you very much. And let me just verify, Speaker 63 Arauzio Robinson is not testifying, is that right? Okay, thank you very much. So we are on speaker 65, Kader Gumas. Welcome. Thank you. Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Board of Supervisors. Thank you for granting me the opportunity to address you today and the public as well. My name is Dr. Kader Gumas. I'm a resident of Burke, Virginia, a corporate leader and a long-term advocate for domestic violence prevention

[03:28:25] and survivor empowerment, particularly through my work with the Council to End Domestic Violence, also known as the CEDV. Fairfax County has been my home for over 25 years. My journey here began as a participant in an international exchange program, welcomed by an amazing American host family whom I still see regularly. From that moment, this country became more than and just a place to visit. It became my chosen home, where I built a new life as a first-generation

[03:29:04] American. In just a few weeks, however, from today's hearing, I will quietly mark a deeply personal milestone, the 10-year anniversary of escaping a brutal-y situation from domestic violence, something I had never thought would happen to me when I moved to this country.

[03:29:29] That experience changed the trajectory of my life, not only as a woman and a mother, but as a person whose safety, identity, sense of stability were profoundly shaken. What I've come to understand is that survival is not the end of that story.

[03:29:49] It's just the beginning of a much longer journey. The years that followed were marked by difficult and often isolating process of healing and hard work while protecting myself and my two children and continuing to contribute meaningfully to this society.

[03:30:09] I learned that escaping violence is vastly different from recovering from it. The systems we turn to are often not designed to support survivors in rebuilding their lives emotionally, financially, legally, or socially.

[03:30:25] Once the immediate crisis has passed, people are on their own to figure out how to move beyond survival and all the barriers. This led me to ask, what happens to women after they survive domestic violence?

[03:30:41] How do they move from victimization to growth and thriving? And is that even possible? What does it mean to thrive after years of abuse and trauma? So I turned to what I do best: research and write.

[03:30:57] I dedicated my doctoral dissertation work, Journey to Wellbeing, an exploration of thrivership post-domestic violence, to studying how long-term survivors move from surviving to thriving. My research, grounded in both academic inquiry and lived experience, aimed to turn my pain into purpose and create a roadmap for others seeking life and hope beyond trauma.

[03:31:26] What I uncovered however in my research was deeply troubling. A glaring gap in the literature, in public discourse, and in the services available to long-term survivors. Domestic violence affects one in four women and one in seven men.

[03:31:45] Yet our systems fail to adequately address the lifelong impacts. These gaps go beyond academia. They're reflected in fragmented and insufficient public policies, limited trauma-informed resources, and insufficient training for law enforcement, the courts, and mental health professionals.

[03:32:07] When these systems fall short, survivors are left even more vulnerable, not only to re-traumatization, but to further exploitation, while simply trying to heal and rebuild a new life. Domestic violence is not just a private matter.

[03:32:25] It is a public crisis, with criminal, social and economic dimensions. It affects the safety of our communities, our public health systems and our local economy. That's why I urge you to continue prioritizing strong, sustained funding for domestic violence services in the Fairfax County budget.

[03:32:48] Emergency response, transitional housing, prevention, training and trauma-informed care are not optional. They are essential. Abuse thrives in silence and isolation. To counter it, we must come together as a county, as neighbors, and as decision makers to take a clear and unwavering stand against it.

[03:33:12] Especially now, amid growing uncertainty in our nation, we must remain steadfast in our local commitment. Domestic violence programs are particularly vulnerable during these times, yet they remain amongst the most impactful investments we can make.

[03:33:28] This is not just a woman's issue. It is an economic issue, a public safety issue, and a matter of community well-being. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for your time and your leadership. Thank you. We are now on speaker number 66, Chris Falcon, to be followed by Jennifer Marie White and Evan Mead.

[03:33:51] If I called your name, please be ready to testify. Welcome. Good evening, Chairman McKay, members of the board, and of course, Fairfax County residents, both here and watching at home. Thank you for your time today and the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed FY2026 budget.

[03:34:13] My name is Chris Falcon. I'm the elected clerk of the circuit court. As clerk, I lead the Fairfax Circuit Court, manage our staff, and our budget. The circuit court is the trial court of general jurisdiction serving both Fairfax County and the city of Fairfax.

[03:34:28] We are the largest, busiest trial court of record in the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. To be effective and efficient, the Circuit Court has worked closely with Fairfax County to make resources available more cost-effectively and conveniently to residents.

[03:34:45] These efforts are balanced while maintaining the safety and security of our community, as well as the information and records we keep at the Circuit Court. The Circuit Court continues to provide 24-7

access to land records and business records through the Court's Public Access Network, CPAN.

[03:35:03] I greatly appreciate the Board's support for our critical IT infrastructure that makes this possible. In the past year, the Circuit Court has also implemented a number of initiatives that make us more accessible to county residents who want and need our services.

[03:35:19] On July 1st, 2024, we launched eCaseSearch, a service providing 24-7 free online access to public circuit court case information. It was developed entirely in-house by staff from circuit court and the Department of Information Technology, DIT, at no additional cost to taxpayers.

[03:35:42] This service has been utilized hundreds of thousands of times and saved our busy residents a trip to the courthouse to search a public case file. E-Case Search is available in English and the six most frequently spoken at home languages in Fairfax County other than English.

[03:36:00] This was made possible by our Fairfax County government staff utilizing their native language skills in order to make this service more accessible to all. I'm very proud of this effort, and I think it speaks volumes to the importance of our diversity here in Fairfax County.

[03:36:17] It is alive and well. In the past year, we also launched Circuit Court Satellite Service in Reston at the Kathy Hudgens Community Center. We recognize that many Fairfax County residents have a difficult time making it to the courthouse, so we are now bringing our services directly to the residents.

[03:36:35] As we look to the future, a large focus will be on the court's infrastructure, including the new Judicial Annex, a 150,000 square foot four-story building where the Massey Building once stood. The project is a significant step forward in the transformation of the judicial complex.

[03:36:53] Our recent power outage underscores the importance of maintaining our capital infrastructure, including at the Jennings Building, which houses our court as well as the General District Court, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, and other justice stakeholders.

[03:37:08] In a later phase, our historic courthouse, originally built in 1799 will be part of the redevelopment. We are excited to be developing the Fairfax Judicial Learning Center at the historic courthouse.

[03:37:23] It will be a one-of-a-kind experiential learning center highlighting the structure of the judiciary and will showcase historic Fairfax civil rights cases. It will be a key stop for the FCPS middle school tour program that is currently run by the Fairfax Bar Association as well as serve as a new museum-like experience for the public.

[03:37:46] Despite all the investment into computer systems, technology, and construction, the greatest asset we have at the circuit court is our human capital, our people. They show up every day, staffing our courtrooms and handling all the work that happens behind the scenes to keep the court running.

[03:38:06] Without our incredible civil servants, none of the things I just talked about would be possible. Thank you to the County Executive, Mr. Brian Hill, for recognizing the important investment in our people through the 2% cost of living adjustment and performance-based and longevity increases.

[03:38:22] The FY26 budget also includes two full-time positions for legal records clerk to help meet state requirements for the automatic sealing of police and criminal court records. Thank you for your support with this. These positions are critical and will help meet compliance with state-mandated changes in the expungement and sealing of those records.

[03:38:44] In closing, I want to thank you all for your time, your support, and your consideration as we continue to innovate and transform the way residents and businesses access circuit court services. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Chris. Appreciate you. We are now on speaker number 67, Jennifer Marie White. Is Jennifer Marie White here? Jennifer Marie White, speaker 67. I do not C. Speaker 68, Evan Mead. Welcome. Following Evan will be Wendy Cohen and David Lincoln,

[03:39:21] if you could be ready to testify. Welcome. Greetings, and thank you for having me here today. My name is Evan Mead, and I'm a student at Southlakes High School and a former student at Rachel Carson Middle School. In my time as a K-12 FCPS student, I've been involved in many different activities and organizations. I've spent countless hours after school, whether it be for Model UN, speech and debate, varying honor societies, varsity swim, or even my own startups.

[03:39:49] Reflecting back, my middle school years stand out where for the first time in my life, I had the autonomy to explore my interests outside of the classroom. Indeed, middle school is the first period where 32,000 FCPS students can develop a sense of identity by joining clubs that reflect their interests and finding an extended community beyond the classroom. And now, their opportunities are going to be slashed by the proposed Fairfax County budget.

[03:40:17] These after-school programs are critical in a plethora of ways, but don't just take my word for it. Over the past week, I've gathered testimony from middle schoolers and graduates about what their middle school activities meant to them. Here are some highlights. Speech and debate taught me that my voice had meaning.

[03:40:37] Without my after-school drama clubs, I would have been lost. I found myself in those years. I am thankful for an extended place where I feel safe and encouraged. The reason why these quotes stood out to me so distinctly is that they each had a core theme, empowerment.

[03:40:55] Through our middle school programs, we as a county are able to support our students' academic journeys early on, in the critical early teen years where self-worth and dedication are developed. This is exactly what sets Fairfax County apart from other counties, our principle of empowerment.

[03:41:14] So what does it mean to be empowered? Being empowered is having a grounding in one's identity and purpose. When we use our voices to stand up against what we know is wrong. Being empowered is stepping forward today and demand that our voices be heard and our futures protected.

[03:41:32] But before we can become empowered individuals, we must first remember that we need to be supported. And middle school extracurriculars serve exactly this purpose, nurturing students early on. studies show that time and time again middle schoolers who participate in clubs exhibit greater self-esteem academic achievement and are less likely to get into trouble in this way they are empowered our county is special as we provide equal opportunities to all students regardless of any external factors the ability to better themselves and not only will removing middle

[03:42:07] school extracurriculars harm all students but it will specifically disadvantage communities without the ability to participate in private activities we as a county have the duty to ensure that all students have equal access to becoming empowered adults thank you and i urge you to act upon this principle of empowerment and fund our schools thank you evan we're on speaker number 69 is wendy cohen here wendy cohen okay uh to be followed by david lincoln and nancy

[03:42:44] Willichoka. If I call your name, please be ready. Welcome. Public safety, the arts, schools, housing, road zoning, all are important issues that we know you deal with daily and you've been hearing about in this budget marathon

[03:43:23] that you've been going through from your constituents. But we are here from Fairfax Invasive Removal Alliance, or FIRA, representing 43 neighborhood associations and over 50,000 households to make sure you don't forget about the natural infrastructure, saving our native trees, and promoting biodiversity.

[03:43:44] Every day, individuals and groups of dedicated Fairfax County residents are out rescuing trees from invasive vines and removing invasive vegetation that is crowding out native plants, which our native birds, bees, and butterflies rely on.

[03:44:00] These volunteers save the trees before the invasive vines pull them down onto the roads or onto power lines or onto homes. The volunteers' removal of invasive vegetation enables natural habitats to flourish.

[03:44:16] But the invasive plant situation is massive, and despite the best efforts of volunteers, we need more help. We understand that there is consideration for managing invasive species under the Consolidated Natural Resources Management Plan, But this plan has a long timeline.

[03:44:35] Like dirty laundry, if we don't take care of the problem now, it will just keep piling up and getting worse as it grows, costing way more in safety, wildlife loss, and ultimately, financially. Your help is needed on two levels.

[03:44:52] In the short term, the county's invasive management program is hardworking, understaffed, staffed to manage the 17,000 acres of natural Fairfax County parkland that are heavily infested with invasive plants. We urge you to not cut the park's budget more than the average across the county percentage. This parkland is more than just an aesthetic and recreational component to our county. Among other things, it is a vital habitat to our native wildlife and provides a

[03:45:25] cooling component in a warming world. And it is in big trouble from invasive plants. This is literally a growing problem that needs to be addressed now and not shortchanged. On a slightly longer term, we also need Fairfax County to support enrichment in the upcoming legislative session, the FEAR-initiated effort with the Virginia Invasive Plant Coalition to change the Virginia Code on service districts. Right now, service district powers include pests and beautification and landscaping, stormwater transportation, a lot of other powers, but invasive plants are not

[03:46:02] included. We will be introducing legislation to amend Virginia Code 15.2-2403 to include invasive plants as one of the powers of service districts. As stated in Virginia Code, service districts have been developed in Virginia to provide, quote, additional, more complete, or more timely services of government. We believe the invasive plants problem here in Fairfax County needs additional, more complete, and more timely services.

[03:46:32] Once the Virginia Code is changed, and we're saying when, not if, Fairfax County will be able to create an invasive plant service district and use the money raised to more effectively help tackle the invasive plants crisis our county is facing on both public and private land.

[03:46:50] The service district designation provides funds without pulling from the beleaguered budget. These additional funds could help speed the process to create a unified, comprehensive of invasive plants effort led by the county with the support of all these volunteers that go out every day and work. Please advocate for this statewide legislation to enable the creation of invasive plant service districts. We speak for the trees and the birds and the butterflies and the bees and we thank you very much for this time and your efforts. Thank you. Our next speaker is David

[03:47:25] Lincoln to be followed by Nancy Willichoka and Molly Sullivan. Welcome. Good evening. Thanks for this opportunity. I'm a Springfield resident. I've been here 36 years with a couple of breaks for working elsewhere. And following Wendy, I don't need to go through all the same points she did, but I'd like to point out that the IMA staff is three people, basically, two employees and one contractor.

[03:47:58] They punch way above their weight, and what I call them is a force multiplier, because like Wendy mentioned, we need not just a few hundred like we're working now, but thousands of volunteers to attack the invasive problem in our county, as in many, many other counties.

[03:48:22] And there are plenty of examples of the successes of IMA where they have trained up site leads who then organized volunteers, and you're probably well aware of the trees that they have saved.

[03:48:38] I hope we agree that we as humans have a moral, even a sacred obligation to take care of our native habitat, because that's what all of our lives are built on. And this is in jeopardy in Fairfax County because, as you probably understand, the invasives, when they take over an area like ours, that's a food desert for all the rest of the native critters that we rely on for so many services.

[03:49:15] In addition, as Wendy mentioned, these invasives are increasing liability to the county because they destroy trees. Guess what trees can destroy? We had an example in our neighborhood of an infested tree falling on a luckily unoccupied car that was parked for the slug line.

[03:49:40] And we've talked about the forestry positions that are barely able to keep up with emergency situations in trees. We, working as volunteers, can help alleviate some of that risk.

[03:49:58] So without being able to expand the IMA site program, which they are not able to do at this point, what's left? It's people like me under another part of the IMA team's effort, and that is qualifying individuals like me to be tree rescuers.

[03:50:22] So I can go out by myself working in park property, cutting and hopefully saving a tree, but I can't use herbicides or any of those things that are now available to IMA site leads. Therefore, I have to go back every year until hopefully a vine gives up the ghost.

[03:50:45] So there are a lot of us who look around and say, well, I'd like to help, but what can I do? And another aspect of the IMA service is spreading awareness.

[03:51:02] So an example is in our HOA, Daventry, there in Springfield, we have been able to establish a team to work in our 39 acres of woods that have been neglected over the decades. And talking with our board, what can we offer for best practices?

[03:51:24] Well, that's the IMA process that's being shortchanged over time. And this one billet, I believe, would be a big help.

[03:51:41] I'll close with that, but as an old cold warrior, I get told this more than I probably deserve. So I save them up, and I want to say thank you for your service. Thank you very much. Appreciate that. We are

now on speaker number 71, Nancy Wilochka, to be followed by Molly Sullivan and Marvin Miller, who is speaker 73.

[03:52:06] Welcome. Mr. Chairman, members of the board, good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on the proposed FY26 budget. My name is Nancy Wilochka.

[03:52:22] I'm the president of the Mason Neck Citizens Association, or MNCA. We represent a unique area of South County that encompasses close to 7,000 acres of public lands, roughly 2,000 residents, and miles of shorelines with a very robust boating community.

[03:52:41] MNCA represents a very engaged and informed population. I'm speaking today to express my organization's concerns for reductions to the Fairfax County Fire Department budget. More specifically, the proposed elimination of an advanced life support ambulance and two staff positions at the Gunston Fire Station No. 20 is untenable.

[03:53:05] The MNCA was established to advocate for the communities of Mason Neck, a peninsula in southern Fairfax County, bounded by Pohick and Occoquan Bays, and of course the Potomac River. It's a major habitat of our nation's symbol, the bald eagle. Residents of the Neck share this paradise with tens of thousands of visitors annually who come to enjoy Mason Neck State Park, the Elizabeth Hartwell National Wildlife Refuge, Pohick Bay Regional Park, George Mason's Gunston Hall, and the Meadowood Special Recreation Area, as well as public boat launches.

[03:53:40] Indeed, in contrast to the more densely developed county overall, Mason Neck, by design, is more isolated. And as you are aware, the peninsula is connected to the mainland by Gunston Road, a two-lane road that can be accessed only from Route 1 or Old Colchester Road.

[03:53:58] Mason Neck can become inaccessible by road from the mainland with just one major crash on either of those routes. Fortunately, we have a lifeline in emergencies, the Gunston Road Fire Station 20, located southeast of the notorious transportation choke points on Route 1 and I-95 and closer to the Mason Neck population.

[03:54:20] Ten years ago, I suffered life-threatening injuries at my Mason Neck home. Had it not been for quick access by the 420 ALS ambulance and personnel, my critical care most definitely would have been delayed at substantial risk to my own life.

[03:54:38] The Fairfax County fireboats are also an important resource for our community, which contains several miles of shoreline and includes multiple small marinas and thousands of boaters. That's why the Mason Neck community was dismayed to hear of the proposed cuts to the Gunston Road fire station.

[03:54:55] including staffing cuts that would also impact fireboat service. If the ALS service is cut, ambulances will have to come from much further away to help not only Mason Neck residents, but all of those thousands of visitors that could have had life-threatening situations.

[03:55:12] Mason Neck's demographics are different. We have a large and growing population of seniors aging in place. According to 2020 census, Mason Neck's median age is 48. That's nine years higher than that of Fairfax County as a whole.

[03:55:28] 18% of the Masonic population is over 65. That's 3% higher than Fairfax County. And 26% are over the age of 60. One-third of Masonic households have at least one person over the age of 65. In an

aging population, minutes can mean the difference between life and death.

[03:55:48] So as I've mentioned, the population served by the Gunston fire stations, not just our residents, It includes the thousands of visitors to our recreation areas and thousands of overnight visitors in the campgrounds and cabins at Pohick Bay Regional Park and in the navigable waters all the way up to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

[03:56:06] The proposed cuts are even harder to comprehend when one considers that Fairfax County is well underway with replacing the existing firehouse with a new, more modern building and equipment. We are pleased at that, but having a new firehouse with almost no one to staff it is problematic.

[03:56:23] Last year, Fire Station 20 was stripped of one personnel. That brought it down to six. This year, the proposed cuts will bring us down to four. So as I understand it, four personnel are one unit, a single resource. If they're out on a call and nearby Station 19 is unavailable, well, that creates some dangerous delays in critical medical situations.

[03:56:47] The downsizing of Fire Station 20, we feel, creates an unnecessary burden on surrounding stations and removes some critical emergency resources. In the Masonette community, of course, we understand the difficult decisions that the county faces in the current budget environment.

[03:57:06] We urge the county to reconsider these proposed cuts, and we appreciate your time and consideration of our concerns. Thank you so much. Thank you. Speaker number 72 is Molly Sullivan, to be followed by Marvin Miller and Yug Mehta.

[03:57:22] Welcome. Good evening. My name is Molly Sullivan. I'm the Liberty Middle School PTA president, an FCPS teacher, and a Fairfax County resident. Let me first address those in the audience and watching at home and listening from home. If we didn't have things like the Dillon Rules in Virginia, Google them, which benefits Richmond over residents, this board could and would fund more broader abilities beyond real estate taxes.

[03:57:48] But until then, we need to raise taxes for public funds, and many of us will not be moving. Those watching and listening know who your Virginia Assembly member is. You can Google them, too. Look up their voting record and see if they support your schools, your fire departments, and our pro or con Dillon rules.

[03:58:05] Then vote in November. Before I get booed again like last night, if you eat out already in the towns of Clifton or the city of Fairfax, Places like Villagio, Fair Oaks Mall, or anywhere in Fairfax Corner, like my favorites, Aussies, or even Chewy's off 29, you already do and have been paying the 4% meals tax.

[03:58:24] Also, counties like Loudoun, Prince William, Arlington, and D.C., they don't really have as much of an issue balancing their budget because they are also paying the meals tax. I guarantee you that nobody is going to stop going to Aussies over this. So let's lay off the nonsense about no real estate tax in Fairfax County.

[03:58:41] For those who have criticized FCPS, please become an FCPS sub. Come help us. We are short subs every single day across the county. Becoming a principal or an assistant principal is actually the only way that most educators will ever have the chance to earn a sizable income and make up for the years of being underpaid and overworked.

[03:59:00] Okay, so it's time for the board. Mr. Harrity, just two days ago during the Springfield Zoom meeting, which I was on, you are unsure if anyone in Fairfax County government made over $200,000. There are more than 10 people in the Fairfax County government earning an average of $200,000 a year or more, including members seated here tonight who I will not name.

[03:59:22] I get really upset when you criticize how much principals make in schools for making the same amount of money as government workers here, too. I'm here tonight, though, as an advocate for after-school programs. Please, FCFT, do not stone me for what I'm about to say, but as a teacher, I'm willing to forego a raise so that the kids can keep their programs and our valued colleagues.

[03:59:42] But again, it's ridiculous to have to pick between the kids and the teachers. I want to let you all know that these are the educators by name and face. As I read their names, I'm going to ask that you actually look up because I brought their pictures today of them and their families. Wanda Talford, Riley Barrows, Brian Klenna, Chris Tippins, Deborah Metzger, Gregory Williams, David Abella, Liana Shivers, Matt Crook, Franklin Kyle, Natalie Duncan, Matt Hofort, Julio Deja, Kenesha Spencer, Kimberly Cardellis, Gerald Minnis, Sandy Donlan, Levina Gangway-Kalako, Philip Harsh, Courtney Molly, Shannon Campbell, Jamal Carter, Christopher

[04:00:19] Woodby, Nick Anderson, Colleen Myers, Dominic Amato, and finally, Lee McGuire. Rarely during any of these budget talks, have you heard any of these specialists mention their job security or raises? They only mention their students. In 2009, their budget was $3.2 million. Today, it's only roughly a half million dollars more, which means over the past 15 years they've only had a 14% increase in their budget. The total cost of these programs also has gone down for the county budget. It's now only represents 0.07% of your FY 2026 budget. $3.8 million breaks down to the average cost of $160

[04:00:54] for the entire year and that means it's 89 cents per student per day who utilize these programs. You literally cannot get a better bang for your county buck than that. Maybe if you asked some of our lovely esteemed colleagues would be happy to come help y'all balance the county budget too. I haven't heard of many other programs in these meetings that I have attended throughout the county, not just this week, that touch more Fairfax County residents each single day than these. That doesn't include how many FCPS teachers rely on them for a second income or the small Fairfax County based businesses that we actually employ at these after-school programs, as well as money spent on food and other

[04:01:34] resources again adding to our tax base and bolstering our budget year after year if you're unable to fully fund contracts for teachers can you really also stomach taking away the teacher's second source of income the school board is unanimous in support of keeping these programs going but not without the money to run it from you rarely in life do individuals have a chance to be seen as a hero but you have that chance with this budget you can be the board that they talk about you can be the ones that save our after-school program and leave the legacy is the board that found a way, the board that valued children, and the board that did the right thing. I can assure you that at least the 46,000 voting parents at a minimum in our county

[04:02:12] won't forget who kept our children safe, especially when re-elections come around in 2027. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number 73 is Marvin Miller to be followed by Yug Mehta and Kanari Koradia.

[04:02:30] Welcome. Good evening. Chairman McKay, members of the board. I'm Marvin Miller. I've lived on Mason Neck for not quite 40 years. And I'm here tonight to ask you to look into what you're doing and

consider whether or not it's worthwhile saving a few lives. And that's what the budget's all about. There are a lot of services that you've been hearing about tonight. You've heard a whole lot of things. I can't believe your patience. It's astounding. You sit there and you take it all in

[04:03:07] and you don't just sit there gaga, you take it in. That's amazing to me. I don't have that kind of patience. I admire you for it. And the county thanks you for taking your time out of your life to help us. Now, where we are right now is Mason Neck was discovered during the pandemic as a really great place to come to do hiking on trails where there are copperheads. Copperheads are poisonous.

[04:03:35] They'll kill you. People, I've seen them because I hike around there a lot. I know what they look like. I'm ready to do it. People who don't know aren't ready. We are a peninsula. We have three bodies of water. We have water skis. We have jet skis. We have fishermen. We have swimmers. We have boaters we have people that are sailing why you want to take a rescue boat away from peninsula that has hundreds and hundreds of people in the summertime on the water makes no sense to me why you want to take a advanced life support ambulance out of an area that's rural

[04:04:13] and they we're so rural that i live on a dirt road and a neighbor of mine didn't make it because they couldn't even find his house on the dirt road with the ambulance that we do have that works. I know of an atrial fibrillation case. The guy's being put into the advanced life support ambulance. He's all wired up. He goes off. Aha! He's having an attack right then. And they're able to do it and get the guy to Fairfax County. Another fellow I know who had a stroke, who used to run marathon races for like two days at a time in the mountains. I thought he It was a little odd, but he was incredibly in good health.

[04:04:53] But he got an ALS ambulance to take from the Fairfax Hospital, and within a few years, for a while, he was still being able to do some running. So the name of the game is rule one, do no harm. Rule two, take care of the safety of the population of the people that live here and the people that visit here.

[04:05:14] And so the first thing you've got to look at is, as someone said, public safety. And public safety comes before everything else. All kinds of things are important, and I know you wish you could do it all, and I wish you could do it all, but you can't.

[04:05:31] So you've got to make choices, but you've got to make choices on things that will save people's lives, and the ambulance and the rescue boat on Mason Neck are critical to that, not only to the people on the Neck, but the people who visit it. And thank you very much, and thank you for your service.

[04:05:48] Thank you. We are on Speaker 74, Yug Mehta. Okay, come on down to be followed by Kanari Karadia and Anamish Gupta. If I called your name, please come on down and be ready to testify.

[04:06:04] Welcome. Hello, Chairman and esteemed members of the board. My name is Yug, and I'm a representative of the Carson Debate Team and the Carson Going Green Team.

[04:06:21] I'm here advocating for our after-school activities. I am currently a seventh grader in Carson Middle School, and I actively participate in after-school activities. First of all, after-school activities provide critical academic support, helping students stay engaged, improve their performance, and develop an affinity for learning.

[04:06:44] They also develop the portrait of a graduate skills, which help them later in life. According to data collected by Fairfax County Public Schools itself, 89% of parents notice an improved attitude towards school, and 77% report a general academic improvement by attending after-school clubs.

[04:07:09] Moreover, research from the National Conference of State Legislatures demonstrates that high-quality after-school programs have a positive impact on students' educational outcomes, school attendance, and social-emotional learning.

[04:07:27] Our county does, in fact, have a high-quality after-school program, which means we are benefiting over 23,000 middle school students who actively engage in these programs.

[04:07:44] The impact of after-school activities don't extend just to the middle school. They lay the foundation for lifelong success. By going to after school programs, people develop leadership skills, critical thinking skills, data analysis skills, all which are crucial for the workplace.

[04:08:05] So these programs don't only prepare us to do well in school, but to do well once we get a job. A study by the After School Alliance says that for every $1 you all put into after school programs, the community sees a return of $3 because these students are getting higher paying jobs.

[04:08:29] They're getting accepted into their colleges and they have increased future earnings. This means that after school programs not only affect us and the students who go there, but the direct community. For middle school students, these programs are especially critical.

[04:08:47] They provide a safe and structured environment where we can explore our interests and future career options. For example, clubs like CyberPatriot, Science Olympiad, Robotics, TARC, Rocketry, I could go on and on, introduce kids to STEM fields early, while clubs like Debate, MUN, and TED-Ed Talks, In fact, introduce kids to speaking skills, again, which are helpful for the future workplace.

[04:09:18] Additionally, these after-school programs reduce risky behaviors among teenagers. Research from Harvard University shows that students involved in these structured extracurricular activities are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. By cutting after-school programs, we would be taking from our students the ability to pursue the career they want and get into the college they want.

[04:09:44] Investing in these programs means investing in the future of our community. In conclusion, in the end, all we want is the future of FCPS and Fairfax County to be as bright as it is now. Middle school, after school programs give students the ability to progress not only in school, but further in life.

[04:10:06] By slashing after school programs, we take from these students the opportunity to gain leverage in admissions, do better in school, reduce delinquent behavior, but most of all, an ability to express themselves the way they want to be seen, doing something they love.

[04:10:25] Moreover, this gives students to study topics that are not traditionally taught in the school curriculum. Again, further expanding FCPS's reach to the students, further expanding our knowledge. You have the duty to empower students, our students, to get accepted into their dream college and make their dream job.

[04:10:51] Your decision, again, will affect 23,000 middle school students. I repeat that again, 23,000 students. Make the right choice. Thank you. Save after-school activities. Thank you. Thank you so much. Appreciate your testimony.

[04:11:07] Well done. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak today. Well done. Well done. You've inspired me to ask my own 7th grader what he was up to tonight while you were here. He wasn't here.

[04:11:23] Well done. Thank you very much. Our next speaker is speaker number 75, Kanari Karadia. Speaker number 75, Kanari Karadia, is here to be followed by Animesh Gupta and Mary Payton.

[04:11:41] Welcome. Hi, everyone. I'm sorry. You guys still have to listen to our after-school program. So you heard about the student perspective, and I'm going to tell, as a parent, what after-school, middle-school program means to me.

[04:11:58] My name is Kinari, mostly known as Ugg's mom and Asha's mom, my first grader, and I'm also the VP of communication at Rachel Carson Middle School. So today as a parent and member of the FCPS community, I'm really concerned about what will happen if the budget for middle school after school program is not approved.

[04:12:21] These programs do so much more than just keep kids busy. They give students a safe space to learn, grow and connect with others after the school day ends. Also provide a safe and supportive environment for students who are in need of child care after school, particularly for working families as middle school ends very early.

[04:12:45] This can help parents balance work and family life while ensuring that their children have access to valuable educational and social opportunities. For many families, these programs are a lifeline. Offering support, they might not otherwise be able to afford it outside.

[04:13:04] I know that because I send my kids to the private classes and I pay for them and I see how expensive they can be or they are. Taking them away would hurt a lot of students who count on this extra help and it would especially affect those who need it most.

[04:13:22] The impact of this decision will on our kids and our community drastically. FCPS middle school after school programs are more than just extracurriculars. They are a vital part of students' growth and success. Here kids can build confidence, get help with schoolwork and connect with peers.

[04:13:43] These programs often make the difference between a student thriving or falling behind. i have myself seen tremendous growth in my own son being a part of the debate club and going to the green club you have seen him just speaking here that confidence has come from this like after school clubs here in the debate club he has sharpened his communication skills and green club he's giving back to the community communities by by reducing the use of plastic water bottles and plastic in the school but so and planting more trees as well there are 50 clubs running from

[04:14:23] there and it's not just it there are only there are like 50 or more than clubs running in the school from science to math to chess arts athletics and whatnot they have so much variety that every kid can fit into one or more clubs families across the county rely on them especially those who can't afford private options. If the goal is to support the whole child and promote equity, then after-school programs must remain a priority. Our students deserve better than to see these opportunities taken away. The proposed removal or reduction of funding for FCPS middle

[04:15:00] school after-school program would have serious and far-reaching consequences. These programs provide essential academic support enrichment opportunities and a structural environment that promise to learn social and emotional well-being and less screen time and as my son mentioned they prepare them for the real world and kids end up going to the better or the best colleges today i am standing and talking is only possible because of my son yoke till yesterday he was just

[04:15:35] a speaker but after-school after-school program debate club now he's an inspiration he's an inspiration to me my family to his younger sister friends and the community communities his younger sister is coming tomorrow to speak as well so you can see that the after-school program is not limited to just one student its its effects are widespread and that's why i respectfully urge The vote to prioritize, I mean, to do something to save this program in whatever way they can.

[04:16:08] This program should and must stay. Thank you. Please, thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony. We're on Speaker 76. Speaker number 76, Animesh Gupta. Are you here?

[04:16:25] Animesh Gupta, do not see. Speaker 77 is here, Mary Payton. and following Mary Payton will be Dr. Elizabeth Frazier and Jerry Poggi. Welcome, Mary. So my name is Mary Payton.

[04:16:46] I'm speaking as chair of the South County Task Force, and I'm kicking off a series of people speaking about affordable housing, which should come as no surprise. So it's hard to keep up with the reports of cuts to federal programs for housing, health, human services, not to mention education and environment, all the things that make Fairfax County a great place to live.

[04:17:18] We cannot hope to make up for federal cuts, but we must direct more local funds to the people most affected by an erratic economy, our most vulnerable residents, who have no frills to cut. On the income side, we urge you to set the meals tax at the top rate of 4% for the first six months of 27, increase the transit tax by 2%, and enact the proposed property tax increase.

[04:17:49] We also think it's wise to set aside a contingency fund to soften likely budget shocks due to the uncertainty of federal policy and global economics. Regarding the distribution of funds, we urge you to restore some of the cuts in housing, health, and human services. Almost a third of the budget cuts. Roughly 19 million of the 60 million in cuts are from programs that serve the most vulnerable people in our community. The cuts to family services at 3.2 million, neighborhood and community services at 6.7 million, and the

[04:18:28] community services board at 9 million come at a time when communities need more mental health care, more after-school programs, and more access to housing. Please prioritize services to keep people housed like emergency rent relief, legal aid attorneys, an eviction court, and wraparound services to help with family emergencies. We also hope for restoration of cuts, cuts that would result in increasing the length of time needed to re-house people who are homeless. It already takes at least six months and we don't need to make it any

[04:19:05] longer. We are grateful for the quarter penny or $8.5 million increase to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, but we're disappointed that the Board has not been able to meet the trajectory of funding needed to reach its goal of 10,000 net new affordable units by 2034. We encourage the Board to ask its data analysts to project the amount of funding needed each year to sustain the development pipeline to meet that 10,000 goal and then to hit those numbers

[04:19:41] annually. We're also happy to see that the budget contains operating funds for the new 85-bed Fair Ridge Family Shelter and a program for mobile home families to make much-needed health and safety repairs to their homes. In a tight budget year like this, you might institute some non-budgetary methods of advancing affordable housing by helping affordable housing developers save money through reduced impact fees, property tax abatement, and other incentives in the planning and development process.

[04:20:20] Finally, we hope you will work with our neighbors in the Metro D.C. Council of Governments to continue to affirmatively further fair housing, even without the requirements from the federal government. Last year we all signed a pact to sign an agreement to pursue some goals and I hope we'll continue advancing and reporting on those goals through the COG, which they're willing to carry on. I think that's wonderful, especially looking at the goals of reducing the racial

[04:20:57] home ownership gap, eliminating discrimination in housing sales and rentals, increasing the stock of affordable housing, and ensuring accessible housing for people with disabilities. So I'll be followed by seven speakers on this topic, organized by Fairfax NACP Housing Committee.

[04:21:18] There are two faith leaders who can't be here but have submitted their testimony. Some of our speakers have lived experience of being in dire need of housing. Others have worked closely with people who are homeless or trying to hang on to their homes. And one of them has actually built affordable housing. And all of these are expert witnesses to the current need for affordable housing in this county. Thank you, Mary. Perfect timing. You've done this before. I'll leave this until the end of the speakers. Thank you very much.

[04:21:57] Speaker number 78 is Elizabeth Frazier, to be followed by Jerry Poggi and Alyssa Densham. Welcome. Hello.

[04:22:18] What do I think of when I hear fair and affordable housing? One thought is of the many people working tirelessly to make housing a reality for the unhoused. We see the results in projects such as the Fair Ridge Family Shelter and the Program for Mobile Home Families.

[04:22:37] But it still isn't enough. I was unhoused from August 3rd, 2023 until January 16th, 2025. If you're trying to do the math, that comes out to 531 days.

[04:22:56] 531 days until affordable housing went from a concept to a reality. Those working tirelessly at the Lamb Center and facets opened the doors to an affordable and habitable space, my apartment. Before being unhoused, I had two jobs.

[04:23:16] Due to a sequence of unavoidable events, including mental health and neurological issues, I was out of work. My situation made it difficult to find work, I could perform, and my savings, let's just say it was enough for a small car repair and not getting by through my worsening health problems.

[04:23:34] An automobile is not meant to house someone, especially when it doesn't work most of the time, most of those 531 days. Some of the daily issues, the obvious would be the lack of a bathroom, sleeping in a seat, which led to bad problems and edema, minimal security, no heat.

[04:23:54] When it was cold, I tried to stick to threes, two layers of thermals plus some fleeces or sweats, a hat, hood, and scarf, two socks and foot warmers, a sleeping bag, and two blankets. The most devastating effect was on my health.

[04:24:14] An outwardly visible sign of these problems were my ER visits. During the first 49 years of my life, I went to the ER three times. During those 531 days, I went seven times. That's what being unhoused did to me.

[04:24:32] One of the few positive things I held on to was knowing that housing was a possibility. I have now been housed for 98 days. Some of the best elements of being housed, having privacy and a locked door that allows for security and a degree of peace, sleeping in a bed, which means sleeping with

significantly less pain, a private bathroom to shower and maintain the level of hygiene that I want, being able to cook, take care of myself.

[04:25:02] It's about dignity, self-confidence, and looking ahead. Each of those who have benefited from the Mobile Homes Program and the Fair Ridge Family Shelter have their own individual stories. The sheer number of basic needs these programs meet, the benefits for children, a safe and stable environment, improved access to food, education, health care.

[04:25:27] The public doesn't recognize the benefits that often come with housing. The advocates here tonight, they need you to fight with them. Fight not just for a roof and for walls, but to elevate the greater well-being of the potential residents and the newly housed.

[04:25:45] Thank you. Thank you. Sorry. No, no apologies needed. Thank you for sharing your story. Appreciate that. Speaker number 79 is Jerry Poggi, to be followed by Alyssa Denstrom and Finn Yates. If I called your name, please be ready to come on down and testify.

[04:26:03] Welcome. Thank you. I'm Jerry Poggi, grateful for this opportunity to testify and for your leadership. We've abundant proof that our community can and must do more to ensure accessible and affordable homes for all.

[04:26:18] If starting anew in Vienna today, my spouse and I, with two PhDs dreaming of having an only child in 1990, could not afford our current home. Despite enormous annual FCPS supports, our daughter and too many young adult children cannot work and live in their home county where we annually invest over $20,000 per child.

[04:26:47] Lower income neighbors work two jobs, just like my four low-wage immigrant grandparents did a century ago. They provide essential services, yet fare even worse. Their numbers and precarity grow ever larger.

[04:27:06] FCPS currently serves 2,300 school-age homeless children, many without connections to parents or guardians. Many exit into homelessness when their temporary foster care benefits terminate. Some graduate and pursue lower-cost, higher academic entry programs offered through Northern Virginia Community College.

[04:27:30] Their president, Ann Kress, offers that 15% of her 90,000 students, 13,500 students, experience homelessness. That number far exceeds our annual HUD-mandated point-in-time survey numbers.

[04:27:48] Without on-campus housing, students either couchserve, commute from afar, or shelter in the indignity of their car. Ensuring Affordable Homes for All is a right that my congregation formally embraced ever since nurturing an annual interfaith hypothermia shelter two decades ago.

[04:28:09] That intimate, ongoing sheltering experience and long-time tenure on our county's Human Services Council and Affordable Housing Advisory Council informs my testimony. Please support the quarter penny investment in the Housing Trust Fund.

[04:28:27] Help frame budget guidance this year that will achieve your stated goal of two pennies by FY 2027. Direct staff to use existing state authorities to develop strategies that mitigate development costs and incentivize affordable housing production, such as reducing fees, expediting permits, or offering density bonuses, each of which can unlock significant value without major fiscal impact.

[04:28:58] Please accept the staff's recommendation to continue redevelopment of the Fair Ridge Shelter for homeless families. This adaptive reuse enhances the well-being of some of the county's most vulnerable populations in their time of crisis, thereby curtailing much greater future human services costs.

[04:29:21] Through your action, county staff and aligned nonprofits can ensure high-quality services and help better sheltered neighbors achieve economic stability and upward mobility, priorities central to our One Fairfax policy and county-wide strategic plan.

[04:29:41] Yet even with this addition, too many exited hyperthermia sheltering on April 1st with nowhere to sleep in peace. Please fund the ongoing efforts to repair and preserve mobile park communities, some of our most affordable but also endangered homes.

[04:30:00] Building new affordable homes and preserving all existing ones is essential. Please set a 4% meals tax rate to give maximum revenue flexibility to support affordable homes and essential services for residents.

[04:30:16] Much more is needed from our commonwealth. Frame next year's legislative package in recognition of a newly elected governor and house by seeking the funding and policy improvements approved last August by the governor and legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

[04:30:36] Seize the rich religious, moral, and economic imperatives that call us to ensure homes for our children, seniors, neighbors with disabilities, young professionals, and the increasing numbers of children, young adults, and elders at or near homelessness.

[04:30:55] Driven by greater community engagement and mobilization, Fairfax will move in a better direction to our collective benefit. I echo advocacy from many others. Let's create a more beloved community. Thanks so much.

[04:31:10] Thank you, Jerry. Thank you very much. Speaker number 80 is Reverend Alyssa Densham to be followed by Finn Yates and Jim Edmondson. Welcome. Good evening. My name is Alyssa Densham and I am the pastor of Provision Church.

[04:31:26] Many of you have heard me speak to you before and some of you have even tasted the meals we make for our community cafes today. tasted those meals, which we serve to our community cafes, which we serve as day centers to our housing insecure neighbors across Northern Virginia. Since 2023, we've served close to 20,000 meals. And in our first quarter of this year, we provided over 2,000 instances of community-first intensive case management across the three days that we are open. Last year, when I stood here

[04:32:03] before this board, I shared with you real stories of real people who are struggling here in Fairfax County because of the lack of truly affordable housing in this county. I spoke to you about a mother who was evicted and was living out of her car because her landlord wanted to get the market rate for his property and she couldn't find another place that she could afford. I told you about a Fairfax County teacher who lives in a motel because she can't afford rent and to care for her medically complex son. It's a year later, and I could stand here today and tell you those exact

[04:32:40] same stories because in a year, nothing has changed for these people. They are still without permanent housing. They're still without housing, and they'll keep waiting because that's what happens

here in Fairfax County. There are a number of affordable housing projects before this Board of Supervisors. The Franconia Governmental Center is one that I have offered my support for on more than one occasion. I also know of fledgling projects around the area. Churches, for example, who are trying to use land that they own to construct affordable housing to benefit some of

[04:33:20] 350 families they serve each week at their food pantry. These projects, though, are being loudly opposed by people who live around them. You see, it seems like everyone likes the idea of affordable housing until it's being proposed as a site next door. We want to believe that the kind of people who need affordable housing are not our actual neighbors, that they're not our teachers, that they're not our public servants, that they're not our pastors. When my family moved here in 2015, we couldn't afford to live in this area. The military had sent us here, and my husband

[04:33:59] was just an E4, and as a military spouse, I lost my job because of that move. Even with military housing, which we're lucky that we could get, we struggled to make ends meet, and I stood in lines at food distribution so that my little family could afford to eat. My family would have qualified for the proposed Franconia project, and I think if I do the math correctly, which my fourth grader might be able to do better than I can right now, I think we would still qualify for the proposed Franconia project. Affordable housing has always been a serious issue for our military families in

[04:34:36] Fairfax County but affordable housing is a serious issue for so many of our residents. The cost of living in Fairfax is astronomical namely because the cost of housing is so high. We have a family who asked us for a grill. You see because of their rent they couldn't afford their utility bills and their power was turned off. They thought that the grill would allow them to cook food for their children. We found the McGrill because that's what we do as provision. We find ways to help people find stability in whatever situation they are in. That's what we do. But we need the county to do

[04:35:15] something about affordable housing. We need the county to approve the projects before you. We need the county to make affordable housing a priority, not just in pretty words, because some y'all are really good at really pretty words, but in the ways that we actually allocate and we spend our money to make it a priority in this budget and every budget going forward. Because affordable housing really is for everyone here, not just for me, although my family could use it, and not just for the folks here, but for everyone who lives here, we benefit from that. Thank you. Thank you

[04:35:52] very much our next speaker is uh finn yates to be followed by jim edmondson welcome um good afternoon my name is finn yates and thank you for allowing me to speak today so this year was my first year of high school at south lakes um south lakes is a pretty diverse school in like nearly all aspects as a result i have both rich and poor friends my my family is very well off my parents own a successful business so i never have to worry about the electricity being out or there

[04:36:31] being like a hole in the window. However, I know many of my peers and friends don't have the same privileges. I remember studying math one day with a friend on the phone. As we were discussing how to solve a question, I heard a loud car drive by, louder than normal. I asked my friend, did you hear that? The car, he responded, yeah, why was it so loud, I asked. Because there's a hole in my window, he explained. I didn't know what to say in response to that. Later on, he sent me a picture of a shattered window with a thin piece of cardboard covering the hole. He told me the person living there before his family had broken it, but didn't replace the window when he left. His parents were

[04:37:11] saving up money to fix it, but most of their paycheck went to paying for the basics, food, water, and gas. That explained why he wasn't getting the best grades in school either. I couldn't see how I would be able to study with all kinds of noise coming through a hole in my window either. I spoke to many of my other friends since, and I've heard similar stories.

[04:37:34] Electricity turned off, no food at home, broken appliances. There's just some of them. The sad part is that all of these problems directly lead to worse academic performance. My friend's laptop died because he couldn't plug it in at home because he had no electricity, so he couldn't get any of his homework done. Everyone knows that you perform worse at school if you don't eat. However, there is hope. There's a solution to all these problems. The solution is more affordable housing. With more affordable housing, families can save money to eventually get their own house. Kids won't have

[04:38:10] to worry about the lights being out so that they can get their homework done. My friend won't have a broken window in his room. That is why today I ask you to fund for more affordable housing, not only for my friend or for those that I know, but because I know this will directly benefit everyone living in Fairfax County. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Ben.

[04:38:36] Speaker number 82, Reverend Walton, I understand is canceled, but has sent us his testimony. So we're on speaker number 83, Jim Edmondson. Welcome. I'm trying to set my timer, Mr. Chairman.

[04:38:53] My name is Jim Edmondson. I'm a forever resident of Fairfax and a longtime provider of affordable housing in Fairfax and throughout the D.C. metro area. I'm speaking as a member of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance. I'm part of a group organized by Jerry Poggi to advocate for both funding and the facile implementation of affordable housing, of which you have been hearing those folks.

[04:39:18] I know I'm preaching to the choir here, so I'll try not to bore you with things you already know, such as how short of affordable housing units we are here in the county. Tom Fleetwood and his team at DHCD have done a wonderful job of keeping the issue front and center for both you, elected officials, and the public.

[04:39:41] You have responded with commitment of resources, to which we thank you. It is never enough. And that is going to be my main point. Even though you face pressure to avoid major tax increases by raising the tax rate on residential property, this is one issue that justifies it.

[04:40:03] So for heaven's sakes, please implement the meals tax at 4% as well as very minor changes to the tax rate so that you don't have to reduce the contribution by the county to the housing trust fund. Here's how it works. Affordable rental housing is unfortunately very expensive and tariffs will only add to the costs over the next few years.

[04:40:25] until the current federal administration is ousted. Let's put a number on it, over $350,000 per rental apartment. If the location is close to a metro stop and requires high-rise construction, it is more than $400,000 per unit.

[04:40:41] I wish those numbers were lower, but they cannot be. If a developer can't rent his units to vulnerable households for more than $1,000 to $2,000 per month, depending on the size of the unit, He or she can't raise the private capital to build affordable units.

[04:41:02] About $250,000, remember that number, of the $400,000 cost has to be in the form of free or subsidized capital. Fortunately, there are tools that permit it, assuming Mr. Trump and Mr. Musk don't take them away. The primary tool is the LIHTC, which is administered by Virginia Housing.

[04:41:23] We compete for allocations of the LIHTC tools, whether the 9% credits or private activity bonds with 4% credits. Northern Virginia municipalities are at a bit of a disadvantage because our costs are higher than in other parts of the state.

[04:41:41] So we require a disproportionate allocation compared to other areas that have similar shortfalls of affordable units. By Virginia, housing does a very good job of allocating. Arlington, Alexandria, Loudoun, and soon Prince William win a lot of awards of the credits.

[04:41:58] Developers managed to raise up to $150,000 of that $250,000 free money I talked about from the sale of tax credits. But that leaves about $100,000 or more, emphasis on more, that has to come from other sources, and that includes you.

[04:42:18] To win this free money from LIHTCs, we have to give developers funding for subordinate debt. They, in each of their own ways, provide it. But as interest rates are going up and inflation in the first source of funding, first mortgage debt goes down.

[04:42:36] As construction costs go up, the gap in the capital sources goes up even more. Let's assume that tax credits continue to be available, we hope. Fairfax has had a goal of limiting the contribution to the capital stack of about $85,000 per unit and targeting the production of about 900 units over the next nine years.

[04:42:56] That's a lot of money, I grant you. But it will not be enough in the future, given the way the economics are changing things. We're going to need in the future $125,000 to $135,000 per unit to produce a tax credit unit.

[04:43:18] Unprecedented numbers. That would result at the same level of funding of a reduction of $2,500 to $3,000 units in total. And that is not an outcome that should be acceptable to us in this prosperous county.

[04:43:37] I mentioned the words facile implementation. I've got a number of ideas about that, which are included in a written statement that I gave you. I hope you'll take a look at them. It includes a waiver of proper commitments.

[04:43:53] You as a board can keep affordable housing financing and production within your sites. Please do so. Thanks. Thank you very much, Jim. Speaker number 84 is Arona Kessler. Is Arona Kessler here? Okay. To be followed by Neera Data and Stephen Termoth. If I called your name, please come on down. Welcome.

[04:44:21] Good evening. My name is Arona Kessler. I live in the Mount Vernon District, and I thank you for this opportunity to address the board regarding the budget. I'm here tonight to emphasize the importance of funding incredible departments like Family Services, Neighborhood and Community Services, and the Community Services Board.

[04:44:41] These programs provide invaluable services to our community by assisting our most vulnerable residents in Fairfax County and preventing them from falling into homelessness. Fairfax

County is in the midst of a housing crisis that will only worsen if the economy weakens and consumer prices go up.

[04:44:58] The families in our county who are already living paycheck to paycheck will struggle to make ends meet and keep up with rent. March of 2025 saw the sheriff serve 761 summonses for unlawful detainer or eviction filings.

[04:45:14] That is the most in a single month since the sheriff started tracking eviction filings in July 2020. This number does not include the eviction cases that were filed with private process servers instead of using sheriff's service. The vast majority of these eviction cases are because of non-payment of rent.

[04:45:33] To manage the housing crisis, we need more funding for neighborhood and community services and the community-based organizations they work with. NCS helps folks on the brink of homelessness by administering emergency eviction prevention, rental assistance, and connecting residents with community-based organizations.

[04:45:51] They also provide moving assistance for families who need a fresh start and help pay the security deposit and first month's rent. The other way NCS helps is by connecting folks who are facing eviction lawsuits with an attorney through FACETS. Without legal expertise and knowledge of their rights under the Virginia Residential Landlord-Tenant Act, tenants rarely get the full benefit of due process in eviction cases. I've seen firsthand the positive impact legal aid and private attorneys have in eviction prevention. The access to counsel in evictions pilot has been extraordinarily successful. Unfortunately,

[04:46:28] because of how the ACE program is funded, counsel can only be provided to folks who report a COVID impact. I urge you to find additional funding for this program so folks without COVID impact can be served. Creating a pilot program for access to counsel and evictions is part of Fairfax County's regional fair housing plan that was published in November 2023. The plan also calls for Fairfax County to expand locally funded housing vouchers and to expand and increase support for fair housing outreach, education and training, testing and enforcement. Considering we have no rent control or stabilization in Virginia, the need for rental

[04:47:06] assistance and for council and eviction hearings is only increasing. Please do not cut funding for essential programs that prevent homelessness in our community. Please set the meals tax at the top rate of 4% for 2027 and keep the proposed property tax increase. I also ask you to set aside a contingency fund to soften budget shocks from the federal government. Thank you for your consideration. Thank you. Let me make sure Speaker 85, Reverend Cameron Wilds, I'm told, is also unavailable, but as submit and written testimony. I just want to verify that.

[04:47:40] So we are on Speaker 86, Neera Data, to be followed by Stephen Termoth and Mark Albert. Welcome. Thank you. Good evening, Chairman McKay and my supervisor, Walter Alcorn, and members of the board. My name is Neera Data, and I'm from the Hunter Mill District. I'm a longtime affordable housing and special education advocate, and I also come to you with lived experiences of being a penny away from homelessness here in Fairfax County. We heard some powerful voices tonight, but I'm here with a reminder for what this really is. It's a moral issue. In Fairfax County,

[04:48:18] the black home ownership rate continues to lag far behind that of their white residents due to decades of redlining, disinvestment, and discrimination. You as a board made a promise in 2022 for two pennies on the property tax to fund affordable housing by 2027. We are halfway there in time, but only a

quarter penny further. The pipeline is slowing while the need is growing, and we are only 10% of the way towards the 10,000 homes that you pledged. We need more than a shelter or a bed or a quarter penny bump. We need urgency, transparency, and annual benchmarks that

[04:48:55] reflect the scale of the crisis. Meanwhile, we talk of one Fairfax, but when it comes to unhoused residents, that equity often disappears. It's not just, it's not sustainable, and it's not Fairfax. If we are serious about equity, we must directly address this gap through down payment assistance, anti-displacement policies, and targeted investments that expand access to homeownership for all vulnerable families. This is why I urge you to adopt the full 4% meals tax and to retain most of the proposed property tax increase. And I know that these

[04:49:31] decisions are difficult and they come with burdens. Programs like emergency rent relief and eviction prevention, legal aid and wraparound services don't just stabilize lives, they preserve hope. We're also seeing the ripple effects of federal budget cuts and job losses. Many of our residents, especially those whose jobs were cut in D.C., are now facing food and housing insecurity for the first time. This county did not plan adequately to stay on track with building or preserving homes, but we've seen sparks of bold thinking before. Turning a vacant AT&T building or former hotel into housing for families, that's what we need more of, bold, innovative thinking.

[04:50:11] And while we're talking about innovation, let's also talk about protection. Nearly one-third of the total budget cuts, roughly 19 million out of 60 million, target programs that serve people who are unhoused, disabled, mentally ill, seniors, and our children. We need to restore the proposed 3.2 million in cuts to family services, 6.7 million from neighborhood and community services, 9 million from the community services board. These reductions come at a time when the community is asking for more, more mental health care, more after-school programs, and more support for families who are living on the edge. I also want to uplift how these decisions affect our

[04:50:48] schools, especially during Autism Acceptance Month. Cuts this deep won't just reduce services, they'll eliminate the staffing need to serve our most vulnerable students, and when those services are missing, students with disabilities are denied their legal right to a free and appropriate public education. Students with disabilities, autistic students included, can and do grow up to hold jobs, pay taxes, and contribute in a meaningful way to this community. They always have, they always will. So I ask you, please don't balance the budget on the backs of those least able to bear it.

[04:51:20] Keep your promise, fund the two pennies, work with our neighbors in the Metro D.C. Council of Governance, give our teachers, our nurses, and our neighbors a way to live in the county, and show us that one Fairfax means all of Fairfax. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[04:51:36] Speaker number 87, Stephen Termath. Stephen is here. Speaker 88, Mark Albert. And Speaker 89, Lauren Lipsy. If I called your name, please be ready to testify. Welcome. Hi, I'm Steve Termath. I've lived here in Fairfax County and first moved here in 1983.

[04:52:03] And thank you so much for the opportunity to speak before you. And I'll apologize up front. I've got an engineered background, so my words aren't always as smooth and as polite as they should be. So residents expect you, the board, to perform the very, very difficult task of developing a budget within the available resources.

[04:52:23] This is the same as every family must do with their budget. Unlike the county, families don't have ways to instantly cause an increase in its income. From previous speakers, it's enough for me to just simply repeat that the county taxes on homeowners over the last five years have increased three times the rate of inflation.

[04:52:47] Nevertheless, the county proposes to once again burden families with significantly more taxes when average family incomes have not kept pace with inflation. I did note in the budget that there appears to be a surplus called carryover funds that the board uses.

[04:53:07] I suggest that the board not use these funds to increase the current year's approved budget. These can provide nearly $200 million towards the 2026 budget. It is noted that the attendance in schools has decreased by over 8,000 students since 2020.

[04:53:28] And the teacher-to-student ratio is essentially the same. This means there are about 380 fewer teachers, but the overall school system employant apparently has not decreased.

[04:53:44] The system needs to reduce the bloated administration and focus on the needs for teaching the fundamental disciplines. The county goal was set this year for reducing agency staff by 10%, but only 3.4% were identified.

[04:54:04] This is unfortunate because since 2019, the number of county employees has grown by 1,047, during a period of which the population of Fairfax County has been relatively stable.

[04:54:22] While the reduction of 199 positions in the 2026 proposal is helpful, that means there's another 848 positions, potentially, that could be reduced. Position reductions can begin immediately, not by hiring into positions vacated by departures or retirement.

[04:54:45] Staff reductions in the school and county administrations noted above would provide $70 to $100 million in savings. It's time for, I recommend the board take a budget strategy to say the objective is to develop a budget without raising taxes.

[04:55:04] Further, the board needs to provide the priorities for a budget strategy. recommend the board should expect the county executive to present a budget without increasing taxes and what reductions are proposed in that budget and what new spending desires are not in the budget. Thank you so much. Thank you. Speaker number 88 is Mark Albert. Mark is here to be followed by Lauren Lipsy and James Martin. Welcome. Hello, I'm Mark Albert, a member of the board of

[04:55:39] directors and past president at the ARC of Northern Virginia. We at the ARC are concerned about three specific proposals for funding cuts: reduced respite funding for family caregivers, eliminating the option to use self-directed flexible funding in post-secondary settings such as college steps, and eliminating three full-time CSB support positions.

[04:56:05] The sturdy among you will remember that two or three people, Lucy Biedenow and Freda Hurwitz, I've mentioned a couple of these. Each of these proposed cuts would remove supports that help people with disabilities live a life like yours.

[04:56:20] And I hope you'll be able to develop a budget that maintains all three of these programs. But I understand that you're facing many tough choices as you go through this process. And that's the reason I'm going to focus on a cut that would cost Fairfax County more money than it would save.

[04:56:39] Pardon the cliché, but cutting CSB staff is penny-wise and pound-foolish, as Supervisor Alcorn mentioned when I discussed this with him. My daughter, Cassie, languished on the wait list until she finally received a Medicaid waiver at the age of 29.

[04:56:58] Fairfax County paid for employment support services from the day Cassie graduated from the Davis Center until the day her Medicaid waiver started paying for those services. My wife and I spent years running a treadmill and making no progress until we finally got support from April Dennis and Spring Tip Haya.

[04:57:19] I love those vernal names. They promised a reawakening for us from the CSB. Without their support, Cassie would have remained on the wait list for even longer than she did. And Fairfax County would have continued to pay for Cassie's employment support for even longer than it did.

[04:57:39] Eliminating staff from the CSB is going to further stretch available resources and lengthen the time eligible people with disabilities remain on the wait list. The longer they remain on the wait list, the more money Fairfax County will spend on their support services.

[04:57:56] Cutting CSB staff may provide short-term savings on paper, but those savings will evaporate, and those cuts will ultimately end up costing more than they save. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker 89 is Lauren Lipsy, to be followed by James Martin, Amanda Campbell, and Blair Moorhead.

[04:58:18] Welcome. Good evening. It's my first time attending these hearings. I have to say that I commend you all on your endurance in hearing constituent concerns here at 8 o'clock on day two. I know you all have heard a lot of testimony already about the Employees Child Care Center.

[04:58:39] I'll try to be brief and to the point. I have a daughter who graduated last year from the center and is now a kindergartner in FCPS and another who's two years old and currently attends the center.

[04:58:56] The center provides exceptional quality care. This is the fifth child care center that my family has attended, and we are not in the market for a six. We're extremely satisfied. It's one of the best we've found or heard of in the entire area.

[04:59:17] And the exceptional quality care is a direct result of the exceptional staff that the center employs. Plans to change to a vendor with a different staff would, from our perspective, completely lose the benefit that we receive from the exceptional quality of care and education.

[04:59:39] I'm not a Fairfax County employee. I'm married to one. And my wife knows that I'm here speaking tonight. She doesn't know what I plan to say, which is good, because I want to tell you that she is an extremely capable employee and very well qualified in her field.

[05:00:01] She has a lot of options for where she might work, but she's chosen in part because she places a very high value on family to work here in Fairfax County. where FCPS is great and we found the Employees Child Care Center to be perfect for our younger child. And we're not alone in finding the benefit there. I attended in November the

[05:00:41] Employee Awards here just over in the amphitheater and was struck by how many of the awardees I knew as parents of ECCC children. So I think what I'm trying to say is that as a matter of human capital, the county's competitive advantage in attracting and retaining highly qualified, you know, professional, analytical, and managerial staff is in part this, and particularly women, is in part this ability to have a satisfying career in the county and also to raise a family.

[05:01:21] And I fear that we may be underestimating the value that ECCC provides in that regard. By the time our younger child is done with ECCC, my wife will have been in the county for a number of years, formed connections, and have some equity built up in the pension.

[05:01:42] And you all may just hold on to her for her entire career. From my perspective, that would be a coup for the county, and it would be a shame to throw away this benefit because it hasn't been run in a cost-effective fashion.

[05:01:58] Thank you. Thank you very much. Our next speaker is James Martin, to be followed by Amanda Campbell and Blair Moorhead. Welcome. Good evening, Chairman McKay, members of the Board of Supervisors.

[05:02:18] My name is James Martin, and I am here tonight to express concern about proposed cuts to the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Service, specifically cuts to Gunston Road Firehouse No. 20 on Mason Neck.

[05:02:37] These cuts could severely impact life-saving services to a remote community with a large aging population. I live in the Hollowing Point neighborhood at the end of the extension of Gunston Road, where it meets the Potomac River.

[05:03:00] Driving on Gunston Road, I have personally witnessed several accidents and the ambulance service provided in the case of those accidents. One incident, it was a neighbor and close friend who crashed into a telephone pole.

[05:03:20] I noticed I had to actually, when I came across the accident, I had to drive two miles back into our neighborhood to get cell phone reception to call 911. That's an issue that, as you know, we are looking for the county's help on.

[05:03:39] Another incident was a much younger person who swerved to avoid an animal, and there are lots of animals on Gunston Road, and went into the woods in the car. They had to come down there and use equipment to pry her out of the car.

[05:03:55] I saw her carted away on the, you know, on the stretcher with things pressed around her head. She will make a hopefully full recovery. She's doing lots of physical therapy. Gunston Road, which our neighborhood somewhat affectionately calls a seven mile highway, several mile driveway, is narrow, winding.

[05:04:26] One lane in either direction, no shoulders. It's the only access road that reaches most of Gunston, most of Mason Neck, sorry. And the other access road, Old Colchester Road, is flood prone and has numerous other problems.

[05:04:47] Each of those, and Old Colchester Road still leaves you five miles from the bottom of the neck. And we have another bottleneck right there with the elementary school and backup traffic in the morning and afternoon rush hours.

[05:05:06] Fortunately, the Gunston Road Firehouse is on our side of all those issues. So it can reach us quickly. If we lose that ambulance and we have to get service from several miles away, they will have to deal with both the extra distance and the potential bottlenecks.

[05:05:30] And that can have life-threatening consequences in an instance where, you know, extra miles and extra minutes can mean the difference between life and death. I get it. As everyone else has said here,

we know budgets are tight.

[05:05:48] We know your tax revenue sources are limited. And you need to make tough choices. I think I get a lot from my tax dollars in Fairfax County. I think our public officials are responsive. Supervisor Stork has been responsive to us on many occasions.

[05:06:07] Chairman McKay, when I lived in my old neighborhood in Jefferson Manor, I remember you coming and walking the neighborhood with us and listening to our concerns, and you took action and you addressed a lot of those concerns. I need you all to be responsive one more time to our concerns.

[05:06:26] Please find a way to save our ambulance. Thank you. Thank you very much. Appreciate your testimony. We are on speaker number 91, Amanda Campbell, to be followed by Blair, I'm sorry, to be followed by Blair Moorhead and Valinda, oh, that's a caller.

[05:06:44] Okay, welcome. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the board. Good evening. My name is Amanda Campbell, and I'm speaking tonight as president of the Fairfax County Special Education PTA, SEPTA. We implore you to fully fund both Fairfax County Public Schools and the Community Services Board, especially the programs and staff providing post-secondary support to FCPS students with disabilities.

[05:07:07] For those unfamiliar with SEPTA, we are a county-wide PTA serving the families and staff that support students with disabilities in FCPS and, of course, the students themselves. Our mission is to empower and connect families, students, and educators to ensure that students with disabilities develop to their full potential as individuals and community members.

[05:07:27] We celebrate the 8th anniversary of our charter on Friday. In that time, we've created a collaborative relationship with FCPS that has resulted in significant improvements in the opportunities and experiences for the 30,000-plus students with disabilities across the county. While we are grateful for the gains made to date, we also recognize that there is still much work left to be done.

[05:07:47] One of the greatest challenges that exists for our community is the staffing shortage for special education teachers. As of December 2024, approximately 25% of special education teachers in FCPS are provisionally licensed teacher trainees or long-term substitutes.

[05:08:03] This means almost one quarter of our special education teachers, those who teach students with some of the highest needs, have the least experience. This does not set up our students or staff for success. The special education AIR audit that FCPS recently completed made a specific recommendation that FCPS, quote, establish strategies to reduce special education teacher workload.

[05:08:24] And in response, FCPS has been analyzing how to implement a workload-based staffing formula. This is good and necessary work that may help in the long run. And it requires that we have the staff to meet the need, which we do not have. We have to attract and retain more fully licensed teachers.

[05:08:41] According to the data from just 66 schools, there are over 200 classrooms where special education teachers are teaching more than one grade level at the same time. We are still seeking data from the remaining 134 schools. Now, I'm a former music educator. My license allowed me to teach K-12, band, music, choir.

[05:09:00] So I understand what it's like to be responsible for multiple grade levels worth of material. However, I was never asked to teach all of those different curricula with different students in the same

classroom at the same time. That is what we are asking our special education teachers to do.

[05:09:16] We have classrooms in the county where a teacher has students in grades K through 6 in the same classroom. Please stop and think about the logistics and challenges that exist for both students and staff when we're asking someone to teach a 6th grader at the same time they are teaching a kindergartner. Consider our support staff as well.

[05:09:33] In self-contained classrooms, especially those with children in multiple grade levels, instructional assistants are often responsible for curriculum and interventions. Competitive compensation is a critical recruitment and retention need. We cannot keep asking our teachers and our staff to do more with less.

[05:09:50] This is true of our community services board as well. The CSB provides important community-based services for people with disabilities. I have personally experienced the challenges of just trying to get the CSB on the phone to start various processes because there is insufficient staff to meet the need.

[05:10:06] Amongst other cuts, the current budget proposes cutting self-directed services programming and three positions that provide post-secondary transition services to FCPS seniors. The CSB provides critical programs and staff to enable students with disabilities to transition from FCPS into the community.

[05:10:22] SEPTA was on FCPS's Strategic Core Planning Committee, and in that work, we were shown the 2022 division-wide post-secondary outcomes data it indicated that 34 percent of students with disabilities had no post-secondary plans one of the highest numbers of all of the subpopulations how will fairfax county ensure that post-secondary transition outcomes improve for students with disabilities and their families if already underfunded areas are cut further the population of students with disabilities in fcps has increased by more than 10 percent since 2019 and the trend shows no signs of slowing. Again, we cannot keep asking for more to be done with less.

[05:11:00] The rhetoric surrounding DEI and disability coming from the federal government over the last few months, and especially over the last past week, is alarming. Our children's worth and value as human beings are not determined by their accomplishments nor by their neurodiversity or disability. Their existence is valuable, period. Disability supports and services are the very definition of DEI work and the foundations of those supports at the federal level are weakened daily. These changes make ensuring that supports and services are available locally a critical need. We invite you to attend our awards ceremony on Saturday, May 3rd at 7 p.m. at Fairfax Church of Christ and

[05:11:37] join us in seeing the impact that investing in our schools and students has and join us in celebrating the students, staff, and community members that make it possible. Again we ask that you fully fund FCPS's budget request and the Community Services Board. Thank you. Thank you very much. Speaker number 92 is Blair Moorhead.

[05:11:58] Welcome. Hello. Thank you. My name is Blair Moorhead, and I thank you so much for the chance to speak today. And I know it's been a long day, week for y'all. One of the reasons I know that is that I was at the shelter house lunch with a few of y'all today, so I know you did not just start your day with this hearing. But I mentioned that to thank y'all for your attention to the most vulnerable in the county, our neighbors who need the most supports, and I'm sincerely grateful for your leadership. With that gratitude, I ask you to continue such leadership focused on vulnerable community members. In particular, I ask you to restore the more than $2 million in funding for

[05:12:38] the CSB's drop-in services, which includes Langley Residential Support Services' Community Support Program. Those $2 million represent cuts for residential, employment, and day services so vital for the adults with disabilities from LRSS in particular who use them. I'm not a provider of services. I'm not a family member of someone who receives services, but I'm here because I'm impacted because we all are. We're all in this together. I am privileged to work as an associate pastor at Emanuel Presbyterian Church in McLean, where I get to partner with LRSS on a regular

[05:13:15] basis. And in fact, I'm also representing my colleague, Emma Horn, who was slated to speak and a few speakers but had a death in her family so she's unable to be here so i invite you to hear this times two at emmanuel we love partnering with langley residential support services in particular we host games nights with lrss residents that's one of the community engagement opportunities where we never have to worry about volunteer turnout can you imagine never having to worry about volunteer turnout at a church even young adults come our college students home from

[05:13:50] college come. They come because we know it matters and we know it's fun to be community together and it's meaningful. We all show up because we know that's what loving neighbor looks and feels like and it makes us better together. And if the two million dollars is cut from the CSB budget we fear for our neighbors at Langley. How will they access the services they need? How will our community continue to thrive together? These are cuts that leave no path to continuation of services at this time. They're cuts that will hit our neighbors this summer without a plan B. We can't do that.

[05:14:27] We can't leave our neighbors without the services that they need. Additionally, we heard at the shelter house lunch that prevention is cheaper than making up for what has been lost. Keeping the services that empower, equip, that build independence is that prevention. As we heard earlier from Mr. Alpert, that investment makes financial sense. Dropping the funds, dropping the services, the staff, and finding out what's going to happen and what it will take to reinstate them is that cost. More than economic sense, though, it's what our community needs and deserves.

[05:15:03] We are all in this together. You have shown us how often this county values our community with your leadership, especially for our most vulnerable neighbors. Please continue in that leadership to keep us better together. Thank you. Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Valinda Wadike. Is she on the phone? Can you hear me okay? Yes, can you hear me? We can. Welcome. The floor is yours. Thank you. My name is Valinda Wadike, MD, MPH. I am the vice chairman at Stone

[05:15:38] Springs Hospital and site director. I work at hospitals in Northern Virginia, including Chantilly and Reston. I'm here to talk about a program that's very important in Fairfax County. The struggle against addiction is a profound challenge that extends beyond the individual, impacting families and communities. In Fairfax County, the need for dedicated services for drug-addicted mothers, especially those who are pregnant or caring for young children, has never been more critical. The New Generation Program stands as a beacon of hope for those

[05:16:14] marginalized individuals providing essential support that, if cut, could lead to significant financial and social costs for the community. Supporting a drug-addicted mother is not just a moral imperative. It is also an economic necessity. Costs associated with treating complications arising from addiction during pregnancy are staggering. Research indicates that the average cost of neonatal intensive care unit, NICU, treatment for infants born to mothers with substance use disorders can exceed $100,000 per child.

[05:16:49] This figure highlights the urgent need for preventive care which the New Generation Program offers. By providing comprehensive support for pregnant women struggling with addiction, the program helps mitigate these exorbitant costs. Investing in such services ultimately saves the community money by reducing the number of infants requiring intensive medical care.

[05:17:11] Moreover, the risks associated with maternal drug addiction extend beyond financial concerns, children born to mothers who abuse substances are at a higher risk of developmental delays, behavioral issues, and lifelong health complications. For example, a study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that infants exposed to opioids in utero face a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing withdrawal symptoms and other health challenges. This situation not only affects the children, but also places additional strain on health care systems and social services.

[05:17:44] Ensuring that mothers receive the necessary treatment can lead to healthier outcomes for both mothers and their children, fostering a more resilient future generation. Transitioning away from the effective programs like new generation would likely lead to a cycle of care that is both inadequate and costly.

[05:18:00] Instead of addressing the root of the problem, patients may be shuttled to various facilities that lack the specialized care required for their unique situations. This fragmented approach could result in increased hospital admissions, higher treatment costs, and poorer health outcomes for mothers and their children.

[05:18:18] A unified program that provides integrated services is essential for breaking the cycle and supporting families in the community effectively. In conclusion, the new generation program is vital for addressing the needs of drug-addicted mothers in Fairfax County.

[05:18:34] By investing in comprehensive treatment services, the community can reduce the economic burden associated with needle-nail care and ensure healthier outcomes for future generations. Cutting such essential programs not only threatens the well-being of vulnerable mothers and their children, but also jeopardizes the health of the community at large.

[05:18:52] Advocating for the continuation of these services is a step towards a healthier, more supportive environment for all families in Fairfax County. Thank you for the opportunity for speaking, and I hope that these concerns are addressed in future budgets.

[05:19:09] Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Speaker number 94 is Marie Carter, who is also on the line. Marie, can you hear me okay? Yes, I can. I'm here. Welcome. The floor is yours. Thank you so kindly.

[05:19:25] Hi, my name is Marie Carter. I live in Region 6. I would like to say, dear friends of our beloved Fairfax County, I come to you with concerns about the impending demise of two-fold value community assets. Our youth and their opportunity to develop as a result thrive in spite of obstacles that challenge their best trajectory.

[05:19:48] Among them, there are barriers of children that have disabilities. As a mother of a special need children, I speak not only for mine, but for all families that know the challenges, witness the despair, and who pray for help to give their child a real chance in this life.

[05:20:10] We must advocate for and represent whatever is best for our children. We have a tremendous community resource located at the Sacramento Center, and it is a place where disabled children and all children have been served well for decades, and now it is being threatened to be forced to close because of new development interests in the area.

[05:20:36] For example, most families do not have vehicles to transport their children to the Sacramento Center. The staff members help the children in areas of learning, STEM programs, and other summer and holiday break programs.

[05:20:52] Some families are making below livable wage trying to maintain a household and provide opportunities for all children. The families and children have and will benefit from the Sacramento Center immensely by keeping it in the current community location.

[05:21:09] These are some reasons why the Sacramento Center and United Community should be saved in order to meet the otherwise unmet needs of the different, abled, and economically challenged of Fairfax County. I urge you to contact your elected officials to voice your concerns and to learn more by contacting United Community and the Sacramento Center.

[05:21:33] Please remember, these children are the generation of tomorrow that Fairfax County should support and be willing to invest into properly and not the interest of a real estate developer. Again, I am Marie Carter.

[05:21:49] I have neurodivergent children, and I love to advocate on behalf of those that are less fortunate as well as with disabled challenges. So I just ask that you guys consider all factors in all communities, and not just on the west side of Fairfax County, but also on the Richmond Highway side in Region 6.

[05:22:13] Thank you very much. We are now going to move on to a series of speakers. You might notice on the speakers list, they all have the same phone number. And these are speakers number 95 through 110, who are all in one location.

[05:22:30] And we'll be passing the phone one to the next for their testimony. And so I'm going to first call Speaker No. 95, Deeps Ron. Are you there? I'm actually here. Ah, you're here in person. You tricked me. All right, you tricked me.

[05:22:48] All right, well, maybe that starts with Speaker 96, what I just said, then. Welcome. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman McKay. Thank you, Board of Supervisors. Good to see you, Supervisor Alcorn. I'm a resident of the Hunter Mill District. I've been living in Fairfax County as a property owner since 2021, and I can tell you I don't envy you, the work you have to do here.

[05:23:12] You're facing a budget shortfall. There are a lot of needs. The federal government is kind of injecting all kinds of uncertainty, but I'm here both as a resident and as a volunteer for Rest and Strong, which addresses housing and food insecurity, and we see firsthand the people with the greatest need.

[05:23:33] As a taxpayer, I can't say that I'm happy seeing my assessments go up over 50% over four years. I mean, I think it's 30% this year, and I can't make sense of it, and it builds a sense of outrage.

[05:23:49] However, working with Reston Strong and seeing the needs, it is clear that Fairfax County is doing great work to support those in need. And I feel that you have hard choices, but please do not let them fall on those most in need.

[05:24:08] You're not going to hear from them. They're not going to show up in the same color t-shirt. They're not going to send you emails, but they're there. We see them firsthand. And what I find in these discussions is those with the least need have the loudest voices.

[05:24:25] And those with the greatest need, you don't hear from. They're working two jobs. They don't have a car to get here. Reston Strong is one of many organizations doing great work in this community, but we need your help. And whatever decisions you have to make, I know it's difficult.

[05:24:42] I know you're trying to act in the best interests. Please start with those in the greatest need. And you won't hear from them. You can talk to groups like us who see them firsthand, but you know where they are. You know what the needs are. And I know it's easiest to cut those funds because there's no political backlash.

[05:25:01] Nobody shows up at your office. Nobody writes an angry letter to the editor. Nobody tries to, you know, seek for you to not win the next round. So I think everybody from Rest and Strong is basically going to say the same thing.

[05:25:17] I know you have difficult choices, but please let them fall, you know, somewhere else through careful, you know, cuts. You know, I think what was worst about what we saw in the federal government is the people hurt first were those with greatest need.

[05:25:33] So I thank you for your great work. I thank you for all the difficult decisions you need to make. I represent myself as a taxpayer and resting strong. Thank you. Thank you very much, Deep. And speaker number 96 is Priscilla Bezdek.

[05:25:50] Can you hear me, Priscilla? Can you hear us? I can, yes. Is this Priscilla Bezdek? Yes. Chairman McKay. Yes. I'm the supervisor of Southship. My name is Priscilla Bezdek. My address is 2716 Oakland Road, Oakland, Virginia.

[05:26:10] I serve on the board of Reston Strong. I've also been a volunteer of Reston Strong for almost five years. With my family, I own multiple properties in Reston and Fairbax County. I'm asking you today to use my tax dollars.

[05:26:29] Me and my immediate family changed over thousands of dollars in property taxes for Fairbax County. We are asking you today to use our tax balance to help our unsheltered neighbors and insecure families.

[05:26:46] We are asking for their basic needs, roof over their heads and mat on the floor. We're not asking for luxury, we're asking for basic human needs. The work that we do in Reston helps lift some burdens of the rest of the county, such as providing food, clothing, personal hygiene products, and much more.

[05:27:14] I am an awe to these young women, Sandra and Sene, who have the kindest, heart, and courageous work volunteering their already busy lives, being a full-time student, creating and establishing this charitable organization called RemakeRace.

[05:27:36] Their mission is to take on the hardest job to feed the homeless and neighbors who are in need of help seven days a week. I am so grateful for being part of their mission. One more is gratitude.

[05:27:52] Thank you ladies, ladies, for allowing God to wish you for his glory. I am rest and strong. Thank you very much. With that, we're going to move to speaker number 97, Ashley Diaz. I'm Karen McKay and

Supervisor Newman.

[05:28:13] My name is Ashley Diaz. My address is 13700 Coppermine Way, and it is Senesca Hotel in Humboldt. I am currently the market manager for the free market with Investing Strong. I volunteer every Sunday to make sure that the market is run inclusive and giving back to our local community.

[05:28:35] Currently, I am looking for you guys to spend our tax money on housing. I'm a single mother of six children who is currently homeless. I work full time.

[05:28:52] I've been on my job for 11 years, but I do not qualify for any type of assistance currently. My children and I are at a point now, possibly feeling straight as a person.

[05:29:11] So listening to this, I really hope that you guys have a chance to see what any of us patrons or many of us people in Ruston and Hardin are currently going through. And I hope you guys make a wise decision. We are resting strong.

[05:29:29] Thank you very much. We're on speaker number 98, Mary Portelli. My name is Mary Portelli. I live at 11510.

[05:29:47] I've been volunteering for about a year and a half. I help out at their Sunday tea market. I've given out a group of students here. I help at the Remakely Convention, their shopping centers, and I've been helping at the beginning of the year.

[05:30:06] What I would like to say is that it's ability for refluxing, sustainability, and compostability, and through my work, I've realized that the need is down to the mortality.

[05:30:24] Yes, and I've found the rest of the children. Thank you. Thank you very much. We're at 99. Kim Williams, welcome. Hi, my name is Kim Williams, and I live at 7602 Gresham Street in Springfield, Virginia.

[05:30:43] I would like to address this message to Board of Supervisors, and in particular, Chairman Harrity, who is responsible for the Springfield District. I have volunteered with Reston Strong for approximately two years. I go every Thursday morning to the Chantilly Costco, where Reston Strong has a partnership, and I pick up approximately 800 pounds of food to be distributed throughout the county for people with food insecurity. As a resident of this county for 40 years, I had no idea that right in my

[05:31:20] community, the issue of food insecurity and housing was such a critical, critical situation, period. I really appreciate the efforts of Rest and Strong for basically making me aware of something that I would have never known about.

[05:31:37] I would like to see our tax dollars dedicated to people's basic necessities, food and housing. Every person who lives in our county deserves these basic things, and they deserve to have these basic needs met.

[05:31:56] I hope that you will listen to our messages, understand where we are coming from. I think seeing it on a weekly basis has made all of us better people, better humanitarians, and has made us aware of the issues that we are dealing with on a daily basis in Fairfax County.

[05:32:19] Thank you. Thank you very much, Kim. We're on speaker number 11, Manu Khanna. I'm sorry, speaker 100. Manu Karna: My name is Manu Karna, and I live at 2114 Tyson's Executive Court in Don Lawn, Virginia.

[05:32:44] I am in Providence District. I am here today to share my strong support for Reston Strong and the Reston Remakery, and to draw your attention to the very real struggle facing some of our neighbors. I learned about Reston Strong about six months ago, and I was surprised to discover the extent of homelessness and food insecurity right here in Fairfax County, which is one of the wealthiest counties in the country.

[05:33:12] Destin Strong has been working tirelessly to support our unhoused neighbors and help address these challenges with compassion and determination. The Destin Remakery is the powerful next step in this mission. It's the vision of two incredible youth leaders, Sonday and Chennai.

[05:33:30] Their goal goes beyond providing need. They are creating a space that offers skills training, immunity, and a real task back to self-sufficiency and dignity. For me, volunteering with Justice and Strong and supporting this cause has been deeply fulfilling.

[05:33:47] It is meaningful to know that my time and contributions are having a direct impact. And now I would like to talk to you about an issue that needs immediate attention. As part of my work, Resistant Strong, I visited several organizations across Fairfax County that are doing related work.

[05:34:07] These are the places like LAM Center, Women Giving Back, Embry-Ducker Shelter, and the North County, Temporary Overnight Shelter. I saw first-hand how these organizations help keep people fed and sheltered. One of those facilities, the Temporary Overnight Shelter, played a critical role in giving people a safe place to sleep.

[05:34:29] Sadly, that shelter was closed on March 31st, and now many of those who do don't have nowhere to go. In recent outreach efforts by the Redken Strong team joined by two pastors, we found people sleeping outside on fences exposed to rain and cold.

[05:34:47] These people numbered close to 100. We don't know why the shelter was closed, but we are urging the county to consider reopening it. I truly can't think of a better use of my tax dollars than helping give someone the dignity of a roof over their head and a mask to sleep on.

[05:35:05] With the resources that the county has, we should be able to take care of just one of our fellow neighbors. Thank you for your time and consideration. Thank you. Speaker 101, Barbara Jackseer. My name is Barbara Jackseer.

[05:35:24] I live at 11403 Henderson Road in Clifton, Virginia. I have supported Reston Strong ever since the conception, and the reason is that I volunteer at George Mason University School of Music.

[05:35:44] I raise scholarship funds for students. Many of the students through the years have been homeless and have suffered food insecurity and other related problems. Getting them through school and a degree is one of my goals so that they will go on to be able to be self-supporting citizens of Virginia or elsewhere if they still choose to leave.

[05:36:17] One of the things I've done for Rest and Strong is help on grant writing and advising on fundraising. I believe that one of the most important things we can do is to create more housing in Fairfax County and Reston.

[05:36:39] It's a serious and growing problem and needs to be addressed. I stand with Reston Strong and support their initiatives. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Speaker 102, Catherine Holt.

[05:36:56] I'm a volunteer with Resting Strong, assisting in setting up the Remakery Art Studio.

[05:37:15] For the fiscal year 26 budget, I urge you to fund arts initiatives, especially those that focus on individuals that don't have opportunities to create expression. The arts are so important for everyone's mental health, they should be accessible for all. We are Rusty Chong. Thank you.

[05:37:31] Thank you very much. Speaker 103, Maria O'Rourke. Good evening, Chairman McCain, Supervisor Behrman. My name is Maria O'Rourke. I live at 14803 String Drive in Herndon, Virginia. I volunteered with Rusty Chong for about a year.

[05:37:49] My primary focus in my volunteering is directing the culinary program. So I've done everything from delivering meals to people in need to working at the Rusty Chong Remakeery, to doing community dinner functions and really just feeding people who are in New York City.

[05:38:06] So Fairbanks County and Reston and Hyman in general have what I consider to be an overwhelming for nutrition services and student security is far more pervasive than I think people are. I would love to see some more focus on the temporary shelter being less temporary because the unhoused of our community don't magically get housing once the temperature goes above freezing, they still need a place to shower and a way to feel

[05:38:40] humid. So I would love to address that. The need doesn't go away. In addition, I would love to see some more focus on people with disabilities in our community. Many of the unhoused in our community have unseen or silent disabilities and intellectual disabilities that are not addressed, and so we have the ability to focus more on these behaviors that are disabled students.

[05:39:09] Thank you for listening. We are on speaker number 104, Kaylin Rossi. Chair, Mr. Jay, I'm Superintendent of Business. My name is Kaylin Rossi. I live at 3253 Navy Drive.

[05:39:26] I am the Youth Leader for the Arborment Program for Wrestling Show. This organization has been able to focus on seating in an open space, people like West People go through art, regardless of their personal and flexibility to use in this work. Freedom security or lack of housing is a pertinent issue in the community.

[05:39:44] While I understand the difficulty of allocating the budget, there is not enough advocacy for the homeless and registered community in my community. I hope you should take action on these issues to better the lives of our neighbors and members of the community. Thank you, and I thank you very much for your time. Thank you very much.

[05:40:02] We're on Speaker 105, Jasper Zeng. Hello, Chairman McKay, Supervisor Behrman, and other county officials. My name is Sasha Zeng, and this is my dad. Jasper Zeng. We live in 1280 Boothside Drive, in Medley.

[05:40:19] Last year and a half has been volunteer with very strong, so this gives me a very good opportunity to understand the food insecurity and health insecurity in our community. I was surprised by how difficult the situation is in our country.

[05:40:38] So I would like to say you guys can direct more resources to this area. That will help, especially in this special time. We got a lot of massive layoffs from federal government. So I think in the next year or two, there will be a great need in our community.

[05:40:56] So I hope you guys direct more resources to this area. Thank you so much. Thank you. Speaker 106, Surika Sredhar. Hello, Chairman McKay and Supervisor Malcolm.

[05:41:15] My name is Surika Sredhar, and I live at 11801 Breton Court, partner to invest in FedEx County. I volunteer with Restless Strong's Society of the Sustainability Team, working on multiple solutions including the GC food waste. We've got here to Restless Strong's Sunday Market Alliance.

[05:41:33] We've received over 100,000 pounds of food waste from supermarkets and pentax families, which were otherwise presented at landfill. Each week we spend oxygen 300 pounds of food waste from the market to the IPC's extension-based food waste composting collection service. And while this is a great service, the demand can't be exceeding the availability. So what I'd like to do this budget season is for my taxpayer dollars to

[05:42:02] Thank you very much.

[05:42:28] I believe we're on speaker 107, Bobby Sariyapin. Chairman McKay and Supervisor Alcorn, my name is Bobby Sariyapin. I live at Q167 Green Chiefs Port in Reston, Virginia. And I have been a RestonStrong volunteer for over two years now.

[05:42:47] I work on the sustainability team. So every week, RestonStrong hosts a free market at the Reston YMCA where we get donations from local grocery stores of food that they would otherwise be putting in clothing and sell. So the vast majority of the food is the edible.

[05:43:04] There's a small percentage that isn't. And that's what the sustainability team does. Go through the food and you take whatever is an edible and you make sure that it gets composted. That means that every week we are sending 150 to 300 pounds of food waste to the local transportation.

[05:43:22] 25-minute drive to make sure that this food is composted. Unfortunately, the transportation is the closest composting drop-off facility that's run by the county. So why do we care about composting? Right now, food waste and landfills are one of the leading contributors to greenhouse gases.

[05:43:43] There are some estimates that there's the 20-25% of landfill that's waste. That's really not what it should be. We should be able to compost more readily. So I'm advocating for my tax dollars to be used to increase composting availability in grassland specifically.

[05:44:00] We really need a facility here that is going to be able to compost our residents' toothpaste. At the market, we have been able to give out compost bins to some of our market sellers and our volunteers. Every week, we get back their personal food waste because that is the easiest way for them to engage in the system.

[05:44:19] So please prioritize increasing the accessibility of composting. I stand with rest in terms. Thank you very much. Speaker 108 is John Foster. Supervisor McKay and Supervisor Berman, I am John Foster.

[05:44:37] I live at 2515 Camberwell Court in Herndon, Virginia. I am the ambassador for the Green Fair Organic Cafe in Herndon, and we are an organic cafe, and I am also the liaison between Green Fair and the Remakery and Reston Straw.

[05:44:53] I deliver food every week to both of them, the Remakery and Reston Straw. I'm really concerned because we've got the challenge of homelessness, homelessness, food insecurity for both the homeless as well as seniors, And so I'd like to make sure that these issues are addressed in the county.

[05:45:16] I want to let you know that I stand with Reston Strong, and I hope you do as well. Thank you very much. Speaker number 109 is Mariam Ovisi. Sherman McKay, Supervisor Alcorn.

[05:45:31] My name is Mariam Ovisi. I own a small business, Beloved Yoga, in Reston at 11109 Sunset Hills in Reston, Virginia. I also live in Reston. And I'm supporting Rest and Strong through being a sponsor of the well-being room, of the yoga relaxation sanctuary space at the Remakery.

[05:45:52] And I'm very committed professionally and with what they're doing here to create a safe space for the community that is in need to not just receive services, but to also integrate with the larger community so that we are in a unified space.

[05:46:08] I'm a big believer that for the well-being of the community and for people to also get off the streets and to live lives that are viable. Well-being and wellness and mental health, top, down, bottom up, needs to be addressed, and money needs to be set aside, and that is not a luxury to have wellness and well-being programs that tend to mental health, physical health, emotional well-being, and I'm here to support that,

[05:46:39] And I hope that you will also stay on the side to support the well-being of the community through wellness initiatives like what is happening here at Remakery. I stand the question strong. Thank you. Speaker 110 is Marcia McDevitt.

[05:46:58] Chairman McKay, Supervisor Alcorn, and fellow members of the board. I'm Marcia McDevitt, 1587 Intellect Court, RESTED, C-0190. I come before you today solely in my capacity as a member of Reston-Strog's Sunday Food Distribution.

[05:47:22] I'm holding my very expensive badge of office. My job is to keep the count of how many people come through. I can tell you that we have between 90 and 140 individuals coming through each week. They're not the same.

[05:47:40] They come from all over. Many of them come on the Fairfax Connector bus. One lady who comes on a semi-regular basis takes five buses each way from Falls Church. Others come in cars.

[05:47:57] Now, we do have a gentleman that comes on his motorized wheelchair on the pathway from her. We have a number of different people from all races and different families.

[05:48:18] What breaks my heart for the small children to come? I don't want to go in tears on you, but I get very upset about that. It's both a home economist and a grandmother.

[05:48:37] I want to thank you for your commitment to actualize Fairfax One. I'm sorry, because it's not what you say, but what you do.

[05:48:59] We are neighbors helping our fellow neighbors, and that is to be encouraged all over the county. Thank you for your attention. Thank you very much. Speaker 111, Jamie Osborne. No, in person.

[05:49:21] Ah, is, oh, yes, you're right. Speaker number 111, Jamie Osborne. In person, is Jamie Osborne here? Jamie Osborne, I don't see. James Gross, James Gross here.

[05:49:42] Okay, welcome. Hi. Hello, FCVS school members.

[05:50:01] My name is James Gross. I'm here to speak about after-school activities and the importance of after-school programs for a community. During my time in middle school, I have made so many communities and connections with people I see every day, like my small little family, and they make me feel really comfortable at school. By taking these away, you are restricting the feeling of community and

the feeling of being loved at school by a group setting. I'm also going to be frank with you. I'm a privileged kid. Many people don't have things or opportunities for fun outside of school.

[05:50:42] For a lot of people, VIP camp and after school programs are the only way that they can enjoy fun activities and experiences that are completely free. And it's really sad to think of those kids and the kids in the future who will never get to experience the feeling of the community and bliss of carefree afternoons giggling with your friends like I experienced today. After school activities have boosted my self-esteem greatly and have made me feel so included.

[05:51:09] Also, shout-out to Mr. Barrows, my after-school specialist. Happy National After-School Specialist Week, and thank you for listening. Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony. Speaker 113, Sonia D'Souza.

[05:51:27] And we said Speaker 115, I think Emma Horn, it was announced, could not be here. Is Emma Horn here? Okay. All right. Welcome, Speaker 113. Hi, Chairman McKay, Supervisor Alcorn, and other county supervisors. My name is Sonja D'Souza at 1820 Michael Faraday Drive, Reston, Virginia.

[05:51:51] I'm a volunteer of Reston Strong and the co-founder of The Remakery, which is a community space open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. We are open to everyone, including our unhoused neighbors. We provide three meals a day and offer activities such as art, yoga, fiber arts, and more.

[05:52:08] I just want to say thank you to Supervisor Alcorn, Gwen, and his staff. We wouldn't be able to open the room acre as soon as we did without their help. We are so grateful. As said before, this is a community space open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., open to everyone, especially our unhoused neighbors.

[05:52:27] Due to this space only being open during the day, we were hoping that this would be a partnership between us and the county. At the time of our opening during January, it was like a partnership. Since when we had to close at 7 p.m., we knew that everyone that left had somewhere to go for the night, whether that was hypothermia or the temporary overnight shelter.

[05:52:52] At the moment, when we have to close, we are unsure and honestly scared that the people we know and care for might not have a place to sleep at night and will be in an unsafe environment. Also, all that Restaurant and the Remakery has done, we have never once asked or used tax dollars to accomplish any of it. All of our funds has come through amazing private donors. We stepped up as youth in the community to meet you halfway. We are providing a daytime facility that is a safe space for these folks and gives them dignity. All that we are asking as youth in the community is that

[05:53:32] the county steps up and covers the night so everyone has a place to sleep indoors, even if it's a mat on the floor. This is a basic human need, not a luxury, and everyone should have access to it. It will also better our community in so many ways, and they have the right to it.

[05:53:52] We are resting strong. Thank you. Thank you very much. Speaker number 114, Joellen Brobelow. Are you on the phone? I am. Thank you. Welcome. Okay. Good evening, Chairman McKay and Board of Supervisors. I'm Joellen Brobelow, and I'd like to thank you for your time today. I know it's been a long day for you all, and I appreciate forums to participate in my local government. I'm here today to speak on a proposed cut to the entire middle school after school program. Most people don't look back fondly on their time in middle school. I know this because every time I tell

[05:54:30] people I'm a middle school teacher in Alexandria City, they tell me so. Now, I love middle school. I loved being in middle school, and I love teaching middle school, but middle school is a really hard time for a human being. You're still very much a child, which people like to remind you of frequently. And when it's required by the adults around you, you need to grow up and be a young adult. The cognitive dissonance is exhausting for our middle school kids, but it's important for all of us to remember that they are kids. They're 11, 12, 13, and 14 years old. I considered looking for statistics and studies to cite this evening, but I decided instead to remind you of

[05:55:07] human impact of the decision to cut the middle school after school program. My son Jack will be a sixth grader at Holmes Middle School next fall, and he wanted to be with me tonight, but he's in bed. Jack will have turned 11 years old just nine days before moving from the safe haven of North Springfield Elementary School to middle school. I, like many parents, have been dreading this moment for years. If he went to a different elementary school, he still gets to go to SAC, where he would be in the older's room, but also be a kid, supervised by qualified and loving individuals, given a snack, and encouraged to play with his peers. But when he went for his visit at Holmes

[05:55:45] and told us about this amazing program that Holmes had, an after-school program, and the way he described it, his dad and I thought he had to have heard something wrong. It sounded amazing. Imagine my delight when we went to curriculum night and he had described the program perfectly, supervised by qualified and loving individuals, given a snack, and encouraged to play with his peers he could have an infinite number he can have an infinite number combination of experiences follow his passions and experience a degree of autonomy i was amazed my middle school doesn't have this and it shows in so many ways jack loves school my dream for him is that he always loves

[05:56:21] school the moment i've been dreading about middle school isn't him being in a building with bigger kids or harder work but that middle school would kill his love of school like it has for so many of my own students. We were both devastated when we saw the proposed budget. I realize you've heard so many impassioned pleas for funding of dozens of worthy programs. I know that cuts have to be made somewhere. I'm just wondering what it is about 11, 12, 13, and 14-year-olds that makes them so unworthy of county support. And I'm imploring you to remember that these are indeed kids worthy of our love, support, and attention. We have an opportunity to change the narrative

[05:56:57] around middle school and support a traditionally ignored and undervalued demographic in our society. I sincerely hope we seize this moment. Thank you for your time. Thank you very much. Let me verify again, Speaker 115, Emma Horn is not here.

[05:57:13] I believe it was mentioned she had a death in the family. And so we will go to Speaker 116 through 119, who has submitted video testimony. ...of Fairfax County and have been living here for the past 12 years.

[05:57:37] Zachary is an amazing young man and adult who is on the autism spectrum. He's 22 years old, and we have been really fortunate to have access to self-directed funding in the county for the past few years.

[05:57:53] Most of that we have been using for Zach to get some job coaching and some adult mentoring skills, and it's been critical in his success as an adult in transitioning out of high school and into the community. What we're mostly concerned about right now is being able to continue to use the SDS funding for an option for him at college.

[05:58:18] And Zach has recently applied to George Mason University with the hope that he can attend the Massey program. And we did this application in hopes of using his self-directed funding for that program and have been very concerned to learn that that may now not be approved.

[05:58:37] And in which case we would be devastated and Zach would no longer be able to attend that program or any other college program that we've been looking at. So this becomes a critical issue for him to be successful in a university setting.

[05:58:54] He's smart. He's bright. He can do it academics, but he needs the support in order to be successful in a college setting. Zach, do you have anything you want to add? Yeah, I really need this money so I can do this program. I'm really excited to get out in the community and get involved in social groups and really help experience college, but I need this money to be able to do so. Thank you.

[05:59:16] Thank you. Hello, my name is Brian Huber. I live in the wayside development adjacent to Tamarack Park off Hunter Mill Road just south of the toll road. In the 28 years I've accessed Tamarack Park and the cross-county trail that goes through it, I've witnessed the appearance and increasing dominance of several aggressive invasive plants and the complete takeover of the forest floor.

[05:59:44] The invasives are so thick they prevent growth of tree seedlings and the natural transition from the current immature forest with mostly tulip poplar trees to a mature forest composed of oaks and other hardwoods. The most aggressive and hated plant in the woods is the multiflora rose, which throws off thorny shoots that can reach over 10 feet in length.

[06:00:05] Maintaining the pass through the woods has become more problematic, especially because of the rose bushes. My request is for the increased funding for the Fairfax County Parks to partner with volunteer groups who are keen to tackle invasive plant problems. We need funding for contractors who could use power equipment to remove invasives from areas that are easy to access with a tractor and a brush hog.

[06:00:26] I also request funding that would support a training and safety certification program for volunteers who have become certified to use herbicides to kill plants after they've been cut to the ground. It could be approved to use battery-powered hedge clippers, which are much more efficient to use than hand clippers.

[06:00:44] A number of people in my neighborhood have volunteered to help with invasives in their removal in Tamarack Park, but we don't want to commit to taking on this challenging task unless we are assured there will be assistance with the use of some power equipment and a follow-up campaign to kill the invasives using an approved herbicide, since the roses will just grow back if cut without herbicide.

[06:01:06] We also hope for a follow-up tree planting program to encourage growth of a mature hardwood forest. It would be great if the county could do more to support volunteers in the invasives removal program. The educational value and community building that occurs with such volunteer invasives removal program would also have many long-term benefits.

[06:01:25] So I hope that ways can be found to support this initiative. Thank you. Good afternoon, state members of the Burkhaz County Board of Supervisors. My name is Lumia Ishazli, and I'm a neighborhood ambassador with Residence Opportunity Neighborhood, and a resident of Fairfax County Affordable Housing.

[06:01:45] Thank you, Purya, for allowing me the opportunity to share my perspective on the urgent needs community members are facing today. I speak from the experience of my family and neighbors, as well as on ambassadors across Fairfax County. Like many, I'm a parent, a worker, and someone who deeply loves this community.

[06:02:05] It is why I have chosen to be involved through Opportunity Neighborhoods. I am here today to ask you to do everything within your power to preserve funding for the programs that offer a lifeline to families like mine. Right now, we are all feeling the chaos from federal policies that do not reflect the reality of people living in our communities.

[06:02:28] Local governments have always been our first line of support, and that is more important than ever. Because of county investment in housing support, I have a stable home. That stability helps me and others every day. Cutting these programs would be devastating.

[06:02:45] It's not just about dollars. It's about families being forced back into homelessness. Parents losing jobs, kids struggling in school, or feeling like there are no options. That kind of stress makes it hard to stay healthy, keep a job, or just breathe.

[06:03:03] But thanks to programs you have funded, housing assistance, mental health services, and food security, people have hope. I have seen neighbors thrive when they get the support they need. I have also seen people disappear from our community when that support is taken away.

[06:03:20] Perkast County prides itself on being a diverse and inclusive community, a place where individuals and families from all walks of life are welcome. However, the reality is that many people in our community are struggling to keep a roof over their heads due to the constantly rising cost of living and rent.

[06:03:42] Please, characterize funding to build new affordable homes as well as renovations and replacement of older buildings in Perfus County's portfolio to preserve safe, quality and affordable housing. Eliminate barriers such as regulation or minimum income requirements that reduce stress to affordable housing.

[06:04:03] Keep funding programs that provide basic needs and empower marginalized communities to participate in government processes. Thank you for your hard work and working to create a more equitable and inclusive community for all. Opportunity Neighborhood is a program that gives people a genuine sense of pride, belonging, and a voice in their communities.

[06:04:26] We are making change here at home and stand ready to work with you in this process. Thank you. Good evening. My name is Cassandra Hoover, and I'm both a Fairfax County Public Schools elementary teacher and also a proud parent of two children who have attended the Employees Child Care Center, or ECCC.

[06:04:45] I'm here today to urge you to preserve the ECCC as a county-operated program, not replace it with a private provider. Like many parents, I never imagined sending my children to daycare. I always dreamed of staying at home. But financially, that wasn't a possibility for our family. When my husband, who's a county employee, discovered he had access, we got on the waiting list, though we never thought we'd get in.

[06:05:07] So when we got the call six months later that a spot had opened, it truly felt like we had won the lottery. From the beginning, we knew this was an extraordinary place. Both our children have thrived there. I bragged about ECCC to anyone who would listen many times over the years we've had our children there.

[06:05:23] We decided that until both our kids are in kindergarten, we would do everything possible to keep them at ECCC. For my husband, this meant he committed to remain as an employee with Fairfax County so that our kids could attend the center. What makes ECCC so special, what makes it a high quality early childhood program, it's not just the curriculum or the facility, it's the people and the structure. ECCC is run by the county, not by a for-profit provider. That means the focus is on child development and family support. The educators are stable, experienced, and dedicated county employees. They've devoted their careers to early childhood education. They hold degrees,

[06:06:02] have years of hands-on experience, and remain in their roles for the long term. That kind of continuity is incredibly rare in early childhood settings, especially in private centers where turnover is often high. As an elementary school teacher, I see every year how important these early experiences are. The children coming from ECCC are prepared, confident, and independent.

[06:06:23] They arrive in school ready to succeed because they've been given a strong foundation by skilled, consistent educators who know what young children need. Eliminating ECCC as a county-run program would not only displace these exceptional teachers since the county doesn't offer equivalent roles, it would also compromise the quality of care and education that so many families depend on.

[06:06:47] ECCC isn't just a perk for employees. It's a model of what high-quality early childhood care should look like. Replacing it with a private provider would be a step backward. I respectfully ask that you preserve the ECCC as a county-operated program and, at the very least, allow the opportunity for adjustments to be made to the program's budget before any decisions are made to replace it with a private provider.

[06:07:12] Thank you for your time and for listening to the voices of parents and educators who rely on this program. Thank you very much. And that was Speaker 119, which was our final speaker of the day. And so that brings us to the end of day two of public hearings.

[06:07:31] The board will recess and return at 3 p.m. tomorrow, Thursday, April 24th, for our final day of budget public hearings.