

Good afternoon and thank you,

I am Vicki Fishman, the Northern Virginia Director of Government and Community Relations for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington.

The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community representing over 100 synagogues, schools and institutions throughout our region. Since its inception, the JCRC has championed the cause of civil and human rights on the local, state and national levels.

The agencies we represent champion these causes every day through their social service work in Fairfax County – both through the volunteer efforts of their membership and through the professional work of social service and health care providers.

Our agencies' work includes support for people in need of affordable housing for so many different reasons –

- we work with individuals with disabilities seeking to maintain their ability to live independently;
- we work with those returning to community after incarceration, in need of a secure foundation from which to grow and contribute;
- we work with schools, supporting students through tutoring, mentoring and food packs to help them through long weekends when school lunches will not be available;
- and for the past seven or so months, we have been working to help resettle refugee families from Afghanistan – those who risked their lives supporting us and now find themselves uprooted because of the help they gave.

The lack of affordable housing is central to each of these struggles and makes each of these issues facing our Fairfax County community all the more difficult to overcome.

The resettlement of Afghan refugees has consumed our work with our synagogue social action teams for the better part of a year. Through interfaith partnerships and resettlement programs like NOVA RAFT, our synagogues are part of an effort that has helped to settle and support nearly 300 refugee families in Northern Virginia since last October. Finding affordable housing, near to resources and family or community support has been THE first, primary, and most important issue consistently challenging these efforts.

Without a place to rest their heads at night – a place to call home – all other efforts of support get stalled. Learning English, enrolling in school, finding employment – do not happen until housing has been secured – and the fact is, Fairfax County simply lacks a reasonable number of affordable units that will help these families – who already have contributed and lost so much – and who still have so much more to offer our community.

It is from this perspective and with the wealth of knowledge collected from this work that I ask you to demonstrate your commitment to affordable housing in Fairfax County by investing - by increasing the budget allocations for production of affordable units. While the costs involved in financing affordable housing may be steep, that funding is an investment. The cost to Fairfax County of not acting – the lost economic opportunity and increased social spending on people who are ill-housed, would be far more expensive.

As noted by a variety of studies in the past few years, including one done by the Urban Institute in 2019, failure to address housing affordability challenges has led to slowing employment growth, has caused people to leave the region and could “undermine the region’s economic growth and prosperity” altogether. With that in mind, I note that while the scenarios I have mentioned suggest the most acute circumstances, for the most desperate in our community, the creation and funding of affordable housing also is an issue for moderate income households – the workforce housing – or housing available to households with incomes ranging roughly from \$50,000 to \$125,000 – people such as teachers, first responders, construction workers, nurses and software developers, all of whose presence are critical to the overall success, functioning and economic well-being of our County.

As the cost of housing rises with increased rental rates, these households increasingly face affordability pressures and displacement, pushing them toward the housing units that would otherwise be affordable to lower-income households. Expanding the availability of quality housing in the moderate rent range, therefore, not only benefits this essential workforce, it also helps to reduce pressures on the limited supply of lower-cost housing.

Finally, I end with a note of hope that we are in the waning days of the pandemic that has transformed our lives. While eviction moratoriums protected residents during the public health emergency, we cannot forget that landlords cannot carry this burden alone. Many of our local landlords are mom & pop operations, dependent on their investment in housing units and the rental income it generated. It is imperative that the County’s system for evictions provide funding for tenants to have legal representation and includes a rental assistance fund that protects landlords as well as tenants.

Thank you for your work and thank you for giving me the time to speak to you today.