

April 23, 2020

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and
Fairfax County School Board Members

Dear Board Member,

Much has changed between County Executive Bryan Hill's budget presentation on February 25, 2020 and his updated proposal on April 7, 2020.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the County has drastically cut its budget, with much pain to go around. We understand the necessity of drastically reducing this budget's revenue projections and spending as a result of COVID-19's impact on the economy.

Questions remain. What resources do we need to ensure continuity of operations for the county and the schools? Also, what resources will we need for COVID-19 mitigation?

We hope that the Boards will continue to review the budget each quarter. If the impact of Coronavirus decreases, we encourage Boards to reduce some of these painful budgetary cuts.

For example, recently Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) switched to a "distance learning" educational plan. Their rollout of "synchronous learning" has gone poorly. To restore public trust and provide our children with the high level of education we expect, what resources will FCPS require? What needs do county staff have for Personal Protective Equipment?

The Board may need to reconsider new priorities during this global pandemic that we have never confronted before today. The Board should consider:

- The health of its citizens and employees and preventing deaths from COVID-19.
- Continuity of operations for County government and FCPS.
- Softening the economic impact on the most vulnerable populations of the county.

Education Committee Update:

The Federation commends FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand and County Executive Bryan Hill for nimbly collaborating on the revisions of their respective budgets, during a volatile time. Each was required to make tough decisions quickly, and we believe each has acted pragmatically and thoughtfully. Their coordination is essential for ensuring that

both FCPS and Fairfax County are setting priorities in the best interests of our community at large.

We agree that FCPS must prioritize the salaries of its existing employees, preserving school-based positions and maintaining existing programs. This pandemic has already caused a sharp economic downturn of undetermined depth and length, which may cause unexpected enrollment increases that would further burden our public schools. In such a time we value our teachers, administrators, and counselors more than ever. By maintaining stability and continuity of operations, we believe FCPS will be positioned to move through this crisis as well as possible.

At the same time, we encourage FCPS to immediately engage in robust contingency planning. Their budget and strategy in FY 2021 must allow us to react more quickly to possible additional changes to operations this summer and fall—including the likelihood of changes to summer school, and the potential that the 2020-2021 school year may require distance learning for many students, and/or for some length of time. Our schools must not shrink from their responsibility to provide a superlative education to our children. We believe FCPS' ability to innovate and remain flexible at this time will be critical to our community's recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

Public Safety Committee Update:

New positions have been drastically reduced from 177 to 20 in the updated budget – with all but one of these positions directed to the Health Department to boost the County's efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

We recommend revisiting the FY 2021 budget in a much more comprehensive manner than in prior years with a robust FY 2020 Carryover Review and FY 2021 Third Quarter Review, as well as a new FY 2021 Mid-Year Review in the fall. In those reviews the Board may be able to determine if delays in public safety enhancements can be diminished.

We are unsure how long the current economic downturn will last as we do not yet know how long it will take for our country to begin to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, even if we can “flatten the curve”, there are concerns that the virus could come back and spread throughout the country once again.

Human Service Committee Update:

Given the projected loss of revenue and the need to reorder priorities to address the health risks and adverse economic impact of COVID-19, the proposed changes to the budget seem unavoidable. In particular, the updated budget is prioritizing the need to support our most needy residents, older adults, the Health Department, and maintaining County staffing levels. The revised budget maintains funding levels for our human services programs, which will be important to help address the impacts of the pandemic on our most vulnerable residents. Predicting the full impact of the COVID-19 on County

revenues and resources will be challenging. Thus, the County properly acknowledges that revisions to this initial readjustment may be needed going forward.

The County would be wise to try to maximize the revenue we can receive from the Federal and State Governments. The County should consider seeking out all available funding resources in this crisis. Additional funding could be used to address emerging needs in vulnerable populations.



William Barfield, President
Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations

Cc: County Executive Bryan Hill and Superintendent Scott Brabrand

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