

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

"To be one community filled with opportunity"

Human Rights Commission
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www.charlottesville.gov/665/Human-Rights



September 22, 2023

Dear Mayor Snook and City Councilors,

Pursuant to Sec. 2-433.(e) of the Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance, it is the role of the Human Rights Commission to “make recommendations regarding the City’s annual legislative programs and policies that will address discrimination.” During their annual planning meeting on March 16, 2023, Commissioners identified housing as the primary focus of their work in 2023. Commissioners sought feedback from community members and subject matter experts regarding specific, state-level legislation that may have both local and regional impacts on housing. At its regular meeting on September 21, 2023, the Commission voted to recommend the following housing-related legislative priorities for your consideration as Council prepares its legislative recommendations for the Thomas Jefferson Area Planning District for referral to the General Assembly. The Commission recommends that Council support enabling legislation related to the following key areas.

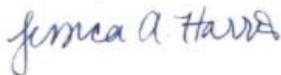
1. Affordable Housing Accessibility:

- a. Allow individuals to use Medicaid and Medicare funds towards rent payments.
- b. Implement a progressive income tax and taxes for consumer services. The resultant increase in the tax base should produce a subsequent increase in funding available for affordable housing.
- c. Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to allow tenants to raise unsafe or unsanitary conditions as an affirmative defense to non-payment of rent.
- d. Allow indigent tenants to waive their appeal bond. This would grant indigent tenants the same rights that exist for indigent people in other types of civil cases.
- e. Require landlords to disclose to rental applicants a complete list of additional fees involved in renting as a separate document prior to the signing of a lease.
- f. Include provisions in the VA Residential Landlord and Tenant Act and the Manufactured Home Lot Rental Act to prohibit mid-lease rent increases except in cases where the renter has agreed in writing that the proposed mid-lease rent increase is permissible.
- g. Authorize localities to pass rent stabilization ordinances for residential rent in mobile home lots and multi-family dwellings.
- h. Grant localities rent control power, thereby removing the inhibiting effects of the Dillon Rule on the ability of localities to enact rent controls.
- i. Begin a state-sponsored voucher program to increase the accessibility of rental subsidies.

- j. Grant residents of mobile homes the right of first refusal, thereby giving residents the option to buy their communities when an owner wants to sell.
2. Equity for People Experiencing Homelessness:
 - a. Recognize homelessness as a protected class in the Virginia Human Rights Act and Virginia Fair Housing Law to prohibit discrimination based upon an individual's housing status.
 - b. Require that each county and city in Virginia maintain a public shelter for individuals or fund a private equivalent, equal to VA Code 3.2-6546 requiring the existence of a public animal shelter in every locality.
 - c. Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to increase the required period for a pay or quit notice to 14 days.
 3. Mental Health Care Accessibility:
 - a. Increase public mental health care funding to compensate for the loss of mental health services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commission welcomes questions, feedback, and dialogue with City Council about these recommendations. The Commission also requests that Council communicate regarding the recommendations included in its proposal to the Thomas Jefferson Area Planning District. Commissioners look forward to planning with Council in advance of submitting legislative recommendations in 2024. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or the Office of Human Rights should you have any questions prior to making your recommendations or if you wish to schedule a time to meet.

Sincerely,



Jessica Harris
Chair
Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commissioners:

- Jessica Harris (Chair)
- Ernest Chambers (Vice-Chair)
- Jeanette Abi-Nader
- Mary Bauer
- Wolfgang Keppley
- Kathryn Laughon
- Suzanne Lynn
- Andrew Orban