



CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

To be a place where everyone thrives

Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 911
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902
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www.charlottesville.gov

September 3, 2024

Dear Mayor Wade 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 9, 2024, Commissioners identified housing as the primary focus of their work in 2024. 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 August 15th, 2024, 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 Commission for referral to the General Assembly. The Human Rights Commission recommends that Council support enabling legislation related to the following key areas:

1. Access to Housing:
 - a. **Limit application fees for rental applications and/or allow groups of tenants to submit a single application.**
 - b. **Require more transparency during the tenant screening process.** Require landlords to list minimum criteria before an application and provide reasons for a tenant’s application denial. Require any fee increases to coincide with the terms of a lease.
 - c. **Establish a state-sponsored voucher program** to increase the accessibility of rental subsidies.
 - d. **Support voucher portability**, permitting voucher holders to apply a voucher outside of where that voucher was administered.
 - e. **Increase state funding for rent relief programs.**

2. Tenant Rights:

- a. **Reinstate 14-day pay or quit notices.** Tenants are currently given 5 days to pay, or an eviction proceeding can commence. This legislative recommendation would expand the time tenants are able to pay.
- b. **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.
- c. **Increase protections against landlord retaliation.** Include harassment, non-lease renewal, etc., as forms of landlord retaliation.
- d. **Require that critical lease information be made available in languages other than English.**
- e. **Create an option for rental payment plans.**
- f. **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.
- g. **Prevent eviction or threats of eviction as being used as methods of coercion for rent payments.**
- h. **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.
- i. **Take rent control out of the Dillon Rule process,** making it more possible for localities to add rent stabilization to their local control.
- j. **Improve manufactured homes (mobile homes) to give them the ability to buy their communities when an owner wants to sell.** This would give tenants first right of refusal and keep a property as a mobile home park.

3. A Focus on Homelessness:

- a. **Support comprehensive probation reform bill** that would offer more support to those experiencing re-entry.
- b. **Allocate Medicare and Medicaid funds for addressing homelessness and affordable housing.**
- c. **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.
- d. **Require that each county and city in Virginia maintain a public shelter for individuals or fund a private equivalent.**

4. Wrap-around Services:
 - a. **Support the development of increased services for those experiencing mental illness and substance abuse.**
 - b. **Increase public mental health care funding.**
5. Other:
 6. **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.

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 next year. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernest Chambers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ernest" written in a more stylized, looped script, and the last name "Chambers" written in a more straightforward cursive.

Ernest Chambers
Chair
Human Rights Commission