



**Fairfax County NAACP
Testimony Submitted for the Record
FY 2026 Budget Public Hearing**

To: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Re: NAACP Testimony on FY 2026 Budget (Full Text)

Date: April 23, 2025

Presenter: Les Shockley, 3rd Vice President & Budget Committee Chair, Fairfax County NAACP

Good day, Chairman McKay and members of the Board. My name is Les Shockley, and I am testifying on behalf of the Fairfax County branch of the NAACP, where Ms. Niki Zimmerman currently serves as President.

The NAACP's mission is to advocate for political, educational, social, and economic equality for all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination. Today, I am here to speak to you about budgetary issues that are important to the NAACP and the community it serves. First, we support the proposed 4% food and beverage tax as an additional revenue source for the county.

Housing

Fair housing has long been a central priority for the NAACP. Advocating for affordable housing to better the lives of lower-income county residents continues to be a key priority.

The NAACP is thankful for the additional ¼ cent increase—or \$8.5M—to support affordable housing in the proposed budget. We recognize the challenges of the current environment and continue to believe that the Board of Supervisors (BoS) considers affordable housing to be of crucial importance. However, we are very concerned that the Board will not reach its goal of 10,000 new affordable units by 2034, given that only 1,374 units have been completed per the Housing Data Dashboard. Reaching 10,000 units requires keeping the funding pipeline steady year after year. Sadly, in FY 2025, no annual increase was made to the affordable housing trust fund, and nothing was added during the most recent carryover. We expect the county to meet its commitment to increase its contribution in the FY 2027 budget to 2 cents.

The NAACP appreciates the County's purchase and operation of the Fair Ridge Center for families experiencing homelessness, which is a much-needed addition. This investment serves as an economically preferable alternative to hotel room costs over the long term and also opens up space in another shelter for individuals. However, the work must continue, as a Cornerstones representative

noted that 84 individuals currently in shelters will become homeless this summer after the new shelter capacity is reached. We look forward to additional capacity for families in the southeastern part of the county as well. We anticipate insurmountable financial strains on more families who will need assistance in the coming months.

The NAACP is thankful for the funding that provides housing for victims of domestic violence and support to Pathways Homes in helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities find housing. Please don't make steep cuts to Pathways' funding, which rapidly shelters people with mental health needs. It provides crucial support for a highly vulnerable population.

We urge the Board to restore any cuts that would further delay the rehousing process for individuals experiencing homelessness, as noted in the County Executive's advertised Agency Reductions list. Currently, it takes an average of 6–8 months to rehouse a homeless individual. We urge you to focus on speeding up that process, not cutting resources that will extend it. With summer approaching, we also urge the County to ensure continued access to adequate indoor overnight shelter during extreme heat.

Education

The NAACP Fairfax County branch works to ensure that all students of color and economically disadvantaged students are on the path to college or a successful career by ensuring access to outstanding teachers, equitable resources, a challenging curriculum, and a representative environment.

Promoting education has always been a fundamental principle for the NAACP. We support the full funding of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between Fairfax County Public Schools and the Fairfax Education Union, ratified by the Fairfax County School Board. The FY 2026 Proposed Budget allocates \$212.4 million toward a 7.0% salary increase for all staff. The County Executive's budget did not provide the necessary funding, and we urge you to fully fund the CBA to demonstrate that you value our educators in the same way you did by funding public safety employees' CBA in the FY 2025 budget. Masters Lane Market Comparison reported that FY 2025 starting teachers' salaries ranked the county 5th among eight other school districts in Northern Virginia. To attract qualified teachers and operational staff, the county should provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain the highest quality professionals possible.

A fully funded CBA will forge the relationship and trust between current staff and FCPS if approved. We are optimistic that the Board of Supervisors remains committed to supporting Fairfax County Schools in achieving its 2030 Strategic Plan goals. The NAACP maintains its confidence that you do and will provide the necessary resources to make this possible.

It is the NAACP's understanding that many Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) job openings are in special education, early childhood education, and resource teachers. Teachers in these areas feel

underpaid, lack efficient support systems and resources, and are forced to take on increasing workloads due to understaffing. What can't be accounted for accurately is the residual effect of not staffing these positions in full. The strain on the special education department then gets spread to all other teachers, who then have to fill in. This risks a decline in behavior standards in other classrooms and a deterioration in the teacher's work environment and all students' classroom experience. Our neediest students will never see success with the current state of affairs in these high-need departments.

Early childhood education is key to providing incoming students in the county with a head start on learning, reading, and math skills, as well as community-building acclimation to what it feels like to learn in a group and one-on-one without their parents. Early childhood education investments can be a significant way to close gaps and provide more opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to be successful.

The NAACP urges that the school budget prioritize recruitment and retention initiatives—including salary and compensation incentives and programs for new educators—to address burnout and high attrition rates in the areas mentioned above.

Legal Representation for Parents of Special Needs Students

Parents often face significant barriers in securing appropriate services for their children when disputes arise regarding Individualized Education Program implementation, eligibility, or necessary accommodations. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Virginia's special education dispute resolution process (8VAC20-81-210), parents have the right to due process hearings, mediation, and state complaints. However, many families lack the financial means to obtain legal counsel, placing them at a disadvantage against better-resourced school districts that have legal teams at their disposal. Parents often navigate these complex legal proceedings on their own. The disparity in access to legal representation can result in students being denied critical services, leading to long-term educational and developmental setbacks.

A county-funded legal assistance program would help level the playing field by making it possible for families to secure legal representation. We believe that this could be achieved through direct grants to qualifying families, partnerships with legal aid organizations, or funding for pro bono advocacy services. Ensuring that families have access to the support they need not only upholds the legal rights of students but also helps prevent prolonged disputes that can be costly for both families and school districts. We propose that the BoS include in its budget \$500,000 to establish a dedicated funding program to support this need.

Criminal Justice

The Co-Responder Program

Fairfax County has a co-responder program that pairs mental health clinicians with police officers to aid in de-escalation during calls involving individuals in distress. However, on September 16, 2024, a Fairfax County police officer trained in Crisis Intervention responded alone to a welfare check for Ms. Sydney Wilson in Reston, who was experiencing a mental health crisis. The situation escalated, resulting in the fatal shooting of the individual in crisis.

While we are encouraged that Fairfax County has implemented a co-responder program, we hope to gain clarity on how co-responder deployment decisions are made and to ensure that established protocols are followed consistently to minimize the risk of such a tragic and unwarranted outcome.

We strongly support more training and certification of dispatchers on the co-responder model and its appropriate use. Having trained and certified dispatchers who are aware of the mental health and de-escalation resources the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) has at its disposal would be the first step toward responding successfully to mental health calls.

We understand there are Crisis Intervention positions that remain unfilled. We urge you to prioritize filling these positions, which is a more effective approach to reducing the county's exposure to multi-million-dollar civil suit settlements for wrongful death.

Public Defender's Office (PD)

The Public Defender's Office is defending the rights of Fairfax County's most vulnerable. Many are poor and suffer from drug dependency or mental illness. There has been a huge increase in caseloads over the most recently reported two-year period. Black and Hispanic arrests accounted for 38% and 33%, respectively, of the total in FY 2024. These levels are highly disproportionate to the county's population demographics.

Counties are authorized to provide supplemental funding, which can account for a maximum of 30% of the Public Defender's Office budget. Fairfax County currently provides a 15% supplement to the state-funded program, which is less than the 25% supplement provided by surrounding counties. The NAACP is requesting that the Board of Supervisors increase its supplement to 25%, or \$300,000. The county's payback will come by reducing the burden on county jails through fewer unnecessary incarcerations for minor crimes.

Providing a Fund for Counsel in Certain Civil and Family Matters:

Legal matters related to housing, employment, child custody, and other civil issues can significantly disrupt a family's well-being. Individuals whose fundamental rights are threatened by the legal system deserve access to counsel to protect those rights—but many cannot afford it. While Legal Services of Virginia exists to support these types of cases, the organization is severely overburdened and unable to serve all deserving cases. Some attorneys are willing to take cases on contingency; however, the requirement to cover up-front costs often forces them to turn away otherwise deserving clients.

Accordingly, we are requesting that Fairfax County appropriate \$2 million to compensate legal providers who take on civil matters for low-income clients. These matters would include landlord-tenant disputes (both residential and commercial), employment cases, child custody, and consumer transaction matters.

Closing Statement

In closing, we urge the Board to take bold action and ensure that the budget reflects the values of equity, justice, and opportunity for all Fairfax County residents. It is our sincere hope that you will consider these recommendations thoughtfully and respond with the leadership and commitment these critical issues demand. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Les Shockley

Budget Committee Chair and 3rd Vice President
NAACP Fairfax County Branch