



Communities of Faith United for Housing

Communities of Faith United for Housing (CFUH)
Testimony for FY 2011 BOS Budget Hearings
April 7, 2010

Madam Chairman, members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. My name is Eric Goplerud. I live at 1564 Regatta Lane in Reston, in Supervisor Cathy Hudgin's district, and represent the Communities of Faith United for Housing. We are a diverse network of faith communities from every Supervisory district in Fairfax. We are your partners and among your strongest supporters in providing permanent housing opportunities for those at the lowest levels of income who are either homeless or dangerously close to becoming homeless.

This year several thousand members of our churches, synagogues and mosques volunteered in the hypothermia project. In this hard, cold winter, there was not one hypothermia death in Fairfax. Over the last 25 years, members of our faith communities have served more than one million three hundred thousand meals to homeless families through Our Daily Bread. As the representative of the Communities of Faith United for Housing, I stand with you to support the Housing Blueprint.

We have been your partners because we know that the government cannot and should not be the sole caretaker for our whole community.

We have heard the critics – some of whom wrote the Fairfax Connection after Chairman Bulova's editorial in February announcing the Board's adoption of the Housing Blueprint:

“If you can't afford to live here, just move.”

“I don't understand why it is necessary to keep shoveling money to people who can't afford to live here. Guess what...do what every one else does. Suck it up, live further away.”

In announcing the Board of Supervisor's approval of the Housing Blueprint, Chairman Bulova wrote:

“Housing programs must serve those with the greatest needs. We can be most effective by working with Faith Community and non-profit partners. The Housing Blueprint represents a new direction:

- to end homelessness in 10 years,
- to provide affordable housing options to those with special needs,
- to cut the waiting lists for affordable housing in half over 10 years, and
- to produce workforce housing to accommodate projected job growth.”

It is painful to see again this year the terrible balancing that County staff and you must do to stretch too few dollars across so many worthy and valuable works of the County. With very tight budgets and great need from schools, public safety, transportation, and parks, we, the Communities of Faith,

ask you to continue our partnership to help all in our community, and especially those with the fewest resources and the greatest need for help.

Who are our neighbors who need us?

Nearly two thirds of homeless persons in our county are in families, and a third are under age 18. At least a quarter are victims of domestic violence. Even though two thirds of homeless families have at least one working family member, the majority has incomes below \$2,000 a month, and half had incomes below \$1,000 a month. These are our neighbors who stock the shelves at Home Depot, check out our groceries at Safeway, landscape and clean our workplaces and homes – and they are paying 40%, 50% of their income just for rent. A missed paycheck, a visit to the emergency room, a dispute with a landlord, divorce or an abusive spouse and our neighbors end up homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Ms. O'Brien, who will speak in a moment, and her three children were one of these homeless families when she entered the Katherine Hanley Family Shelter last year. With the support of the shelter staff and the availability of affordable housing, Ms. O'Brien is now recovering from the domestic violence she and her family experienced, she's working, finishing school, and is steps away from financially supporting herself, and her three children.

Who are the single people who are homeless? At least 3 of every five have a serious mental illness, addiction, or both. A third has a chronic health problem, and one in ten is physically disabled. And more than half of them are lifelong Fairfax county residents who were born here, went to school here, and live here because Fairfax is their home, where there are jobs, friends and safety here – the same reasons that all of us live here.

Jerome, who will speak after Ms. O'Brien, was homeless for five years until he secured supportive housing with FACETS. Jerome has been in the supportive housing program for just over one year. While working with the FACETS program, he has been able to obtain a promotion to become the program director of the Falls Church Drop-In Center and find other housing through the Fairfax County Voucher Program.

The Communities of Faith United for Housing want to create a county that works for all of us. We strongly support the Supervisors' commitment to prevent and end homelessness. This commitment is already showing results – the latest Point-in-Time survey showed a decrease of almost 11% in the number of homeless people in the Fairfax/Falls Church community.

To continue to prevent and end homelessness, we ask you to provide the \$10 million needed to fully fund the Housing Blueprint in FY 2011.

But affordable housing alone is not enough. Many people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless need support services to make the transition to self-sufficiency and, for some people with physical or mental disabilities, to remain housed.

We ask that the FY 2011 budget include the funding for the Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) at the same level as 2010: \$9 million and the \$1 million funding for emergency support of community organizations as proposed by the County Executive in the Advertised Budget.

We also ask the Board to restore the Community Services Board (CSB) funding for emergency services for people who are mentally ill or addicted to drugs and alcohol.

To fund these programs, CFUH supports the proposed revenue enhancements in the Advertised Budget including increasing the tax rate to \$1.10, a rate that would keep the average tax bill at the 2010 level, and the reinstatement of the local vehicle registration fee.

For more than 30 years, the faith community has worked with the County to end homelessness. We, the members of the faith community, stand with you today, and we extend the “political will” of more than 2,300 volunteers in the hypothermia project, and many more volunteers in our churches’ emergency food programs, housing first and sheltering programs – to offer these same things that we value – safe, healthy, affordable living for our neighbors, friends and family, who are poor, who are homeless, and who call on our compassion and our help. Please fully fund the Housing Blueprint. You can count on us as your partners.