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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 23, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #43 CHILD CARE CENTER RATE AND FEE SYSTEM ELIGIBILITY ISSUES (MAYOR DONLEY'S REQUEST)

This memorandum is in response to Mayor Donley's request for information on child care center rate issues, specifically: (1) a comparison of Alexandria's child care center rates with the rates in neighboring jurisdictions; (2) the historical perspective of rate increases for child care centers; (3) what it would cost to raise the Alexandria child care center infant, toddler and preschool rates to the equivalent of those of Fairfax County; and 4) what it would cost to raise Fee System eligibility from 185% to 250% of poverty. This request stemmed from testimony given by Ms. Kathy Wilson, Board Member of the Alexandria Child Care Director's Association, at the April 8, 2002, Public Hearing (Attachment 1).

Background

1. Maximum Reimbursable Rates:

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VaDSS) establishes the Child Day Care Program "maximum reimbursable rates" (MRR) (formerly known as market rates) for each locality through a market rate survey. These rates are very important not only to the provider but to the City as they represent the upper limit of State and federal reimbursement. The survey gathers the different rates charged by private child care providers and centers, and uses the 75th percentile of the range of rates in each group to determine the "maximum reimbursable rates." These are the maximum rates that the State will reimburse the City in each age group. In other words, the State, in effect, pays the difference between the MRR and the payment made by the parents (which, depending on the parent income, is a specified percentage of the MRR); any payment to the child care provider above the MRR may not come from the parent, but only from a third party (e.g., the City, a church, a non-profit organization).

The last VaDSS market rate survey of child care centers and family child care homes was completed in the fall of 1999. Because the State did not have sufficient funds to implement the full increase to the 75th percentile, VaDSS implemented only 50% of the actual increase. Therefore, the rates currently in effect are not true market rates, and have been renamed "maximum reimbursable rates." The rates from the 1999 survey were implemented in July 2001.

A new child care center rate survey was mailed in March 2002, and a family child care survey is due to be mailed in the next few weeks. However, the \$5.7 million that was set-aside in the VaDSS budget for a rate increase in FY 2003 was deleted in the State budget process, and it is not likely that there will be an increase in July 2002. A State-level task force was established last year to review the current market rate process and to make recommendations to the Commissioner of Social Services. This task force has not met in 2002 and has made no written report. DHS staff will attend any future meetings of this group.

2. Income Eligibility Limits:

From 1989 until the passage of Welfare Reform legislation in 1996, the eligibility level for the Fee System in Alexandria was 70% of the State median income. In 1996, the Fee System eligibility limit for Northern Virginia was changed to 185% of the federal poverty level (see Attachment 2 for current eligibility limits). Today, the 185% of federal poverty level is roughly equivalent to 52% of the State median income, and therefore is significantly lower than it had been prior to 1996. Currently, VaDSS fee system eligibility limits range from 150% to 185% of poverty depending on which of three groups the locality falls into as determined by local median income (Attachment 3).

The decrease in the eligibility level in 1996 from 70% of the State median income to 185% of the federal poverty level resulted in far fewer families being eligible for the Fee System, with the most severe impact coming during the current fiscal year. For example, in previous years an average of 50% of the families on the Fee System waiting list were found eligible for the program. This year, fewer than 20% of families from the waiting list were found to be financially eligible. Another factor is that the Fee System income eligibility levels have not kept pace with increases in income and cost of living. This is true not only in Alexandria, but throughout the Washington Metropolitan Area.

For the past four years, the City has included in its legislative packet a request to increase the eligibility limits for the Fee System in Northern Virginia localities to at least 200% of the federal poverty level. These efforts have been unsuccessful. Because VaDSS has the ability to make this change administratively, Alexandria and other localities have advocated for changes in the market rate process and in eligibility limits with no success due to a lack of federal and State funding.

There is no State or federal regulation that would prohibit a locality from supplementing State reimbursement rates or fee system eligibility limits. Other than the Alexandria supplement for family child care providers, none of the Northern Virginia jurisdictions currently supplements the maximum reimbursable rates. However, Fairfax County supplements the fee system eligibility limit with local funds for families with incomes between 185% of poverty and 50% of the County median income (see Attachment 4). This means that, for families in this income range, the County pays the

full difference between the MRR and the parent payment (which is a defined percentage of the MRR).

Responses to Council Inquiries

1. Comparison of Rates with Neighboring Jurisdictions: As Table 1 illustrates, the rates in Alexandria for child care centers, based on the VaDSS survey, are lower than rates in Fairfax County and Arlington and higher than the rates in Prince William County and Loudoun County, with the one exception of before school care.

Age Group (1)	FY93 Alexandria (2)	FY97 Alexandria (3)	FY02 Alexandria (4)	FY 02 Fairfax (5)	FY02 Arlington (6)	FY02 Prince William (7)	FY02 Loudoun (8)
Infant	\$149	\$183	\$187	\$190	\$197	\$154	\$177
Toddler	\$126 ¹	\$175	\$180	\$185	\$197	\$154	\$170
Preschool	\$118	\$138	\$145	\$161	\$167	\$128	\$140
School Age	\$100	\$130	\$143	\$148	\$165	\$121	\$132
Before School	\$25	\$40	\$44	\$54	\$17	\$52	\$58
After School	\$32	\$60	\$70	\$66	\$41	\$57	\$66
Before & After	\$74	\$85	\$92	\$95	\$94	\$81	\$91

2. Historical Perspective of Rate Increases for Child Care Centers: The FY 2002 rates went into effect in July 2001 and represented the first State increase in provider reimbursement rates since FY 1997. The first rate survey was completed and implemented in FY 1993.

3. Cost of Raising Center Infant, Toddler and Preschool Rates to the Current MRR of Fairfax County: Staff estimates that the cost of a local supplement to raise the center child care rates to the equivalent of the current Fairfax County MRRs for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, as shown in column five in Table 1, for our current caseload of 294 children would be approximately \$100,000 in FY 2003. The current FY 2002 rate of expenditure for centers at the State MRR is \$1.2 million per year. A local supplement would increase this amount to \$1.3 million. It is recommended that any increase approved by City Council be to the rates currently in place in Fairfax County and not to any future increased MRRs which may go into effect in Fairfax County. Increases in center rates,

¹The separate toddler rate was first established in FY1994.

if approved, would apply across the board to TANF Child Care, Transitional Child Care (TCC) and the Child Day Care Fee System.

4. Cost of Raising Fee System Eligibility from 185% to 250% of Poverty: The cost of raising the eligibility guidelines is very difficult to estimate because the number of children whose family income would fall between 185 and 250% of poverty is unknown. Information on this group of children is not contained in any of the City's caseload data because families with incomes above 185% of poverty are not eligible for human service assistance programs. Income data from the 2000 Census will not be available before the summer, and data from the 1990 Census is not accurate or helpful as it is twelve years old. In addition, inquiries to the Health and Human Services Child Care Bureau, the National Center for Children in Poverty, the National Child Care Information Center and the Virginia Department of Social Services have yielded no usable data. It should be noted that, under current City policy, the increase in fee system eligibility, unlike an increase in center rates, would need to apply both to families with children in center care and to families with children in family child care.

The typical Fee System family is a single parent with two children. Table 3 demonstrates the annual income level for a family of three and the equivalent eligibility limit for the fee system from 185% to 250% of poverty.

185%	200%	225%	250%
\$27,060	\$29,256	\$32,913	\$36,570

While the cost of raising the eligibility level for an undetermined number of children cannot be estimated, staff can predict with some accuracy the cost of adding a specific number of children to the Fee System at the increased eligibility limit, as shown in Table 3.

# children	Cost of Supplement
25	\$80,000
50	\$160,000
75	\$240,000
100	\$320,000

Should City Council decide to pursue an expansion of eligibility guidelines (e.g., to 225% of poverty) through the allocation of a specific amount of local funding, DHS staff would monitor the amount of local expenditures, and would establish a separate waiting list if necessary. When needed, as families leave the system, eligible families would be taken from the waiting list. At the end of

one year of service, staff would be better able to project the number of children and the cost associated with the expanded eligibility level of 225% of poverty.

The Alexandria Center Directors Association were shown a draft of this memo and were asked to prioritize the two requests for: 1) an increase in rates; and 2) an increase in the fee system eligibility limit. They have indicated that each issue is a priority for them and do not want to prioritize. Center Directors also indicated that they would prefer proposed eligibility guidelines be set at 250% of poverty.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 - Testimony before the Alexandria City Council by Kathy Wilson, Board Member, Alexandria Child Care Director's Association, dated April 8, 2002
- Attachment 2 - City of Alexandria, Virginia Child Day Care Fee System Maximum Monthly Income Level chart
- Attachment 3 - Virginia Department of Social Services State Sliding Fee Scale for Child Day Care
- Attachment 4 - County of Fairfax, Virginia Child Day Care Fee System Maximum Monthly Income Level chart

cc: Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal and Financial Affairs
Meg O'Regan, Director, Department of Human Resources
Jack Powers, Director, Division of Community Programs, DHS
Carol Farrell, Director, Office for Early Childhood Development, DHS
Marcie Kavanaugh, Director of Operations, Department of Human Services
Carol Moore, Acting Deputy Director, Office of Management and Budget

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**Kathy Wilson
Board Member
Alexandria Child Care Director's Association
Testimony Before the Alexandria City Council
April 8, 2002**

My name is Kathy Wilson. I have been asked to speak on behalf of the Alexandria Child Care Director's Association of which I am a member and have previously served for seven years as Chair. For eleven years, I have served as director of Abracadabra Child Care and Development Center.

The Director's Association is comprised of a majority of the City's child care centers and represents all nationally accredited child care centers in the City.

This is what center directors ask of you today: we ask that you raise the City's reimbursement rate and eligibility scale for subsidized child care to the level of Fairfax County's.

These two terms are quite familiar to all of you.

The reimbursement rate - sometimes referred to as the market rate - is the rate at which centers that serve low income children are reimbursed for subsidized childcare. But to call it market rate is a misnomer. It is no where near the market rate. The reimbursement rate the City offers is far below the cost of providing child care and far below the already artificially depressed market rate for child care .

Alexandria's preschool subsidy is \$145 per week while Fairfax County's is \$161 per week.

The eligibility scale is a rate expressed in terms of the poverty rate. Currently, a family of four, living in Alexandria is eligible for child care subsidy if their income is 185% of poverty or \$30,895 annually. We believe that this rate should be raised to 250% of the poverty level – as with Fairfax County's – which, for a family of four is \$41,750 annually.

Here is the problem in childcare today in Alexandria, and again I want to remind you I speak for every certified preschool in the city.

There is little incentive for centers to take low income children under the current reimbursement rate that inadequately compensates child care centers, failing to pay for the care and education provided by qualified teachers.

Because the reimbursement rate does not cover the per child cost of teacher salaries, materials, rent, or insurance -- increasingly centers are reluctant to serve these children.

But the insufficient reimbursement rate is not the only disincentive.

The eligibility rate is too low. So when parents make an effort to improve their lives by getting a better job or receiving a raise, their access to an affordable and quality preschool is yanked from under them because they exceed an eligibility level that is pegged too low for the cost of living in Alexandria. These enrollments prove to be short-lived, providing another disincentive for center enrollment.

As congestion and the rising cost of living have escalated real estate values and rents, child care centers must receive higher reimbursements to afford to offer this essential service to our City's most vulnerable children.

Let me give you one human example of what is happening out there. Forget for a moment about market rates, eligibility scales, poverty rates and regional differences.

Recently, my center had a family, which we served. When the father received an offer for a better job he took it. Although the combined family income was less than \$35,000, he exceeded the eligibility standards and was forced to pull his child from our center. Although his new salary was too high for subsidy, it was still too low to support self-sufficiency. Affordable child care... he found unsuitable. He may be forced to leave the work force. Loss of employment has serious negative implications for the well-being of families and undermines the long-term success of welfare reform.

The City has failed him. His success, his hard work, his good fortune were his downfall. When he placed the weight of his family on the next rung of the ladder toward the American dream, it broke.

Child care centers in Alexandria can not shoulder the responsibility that this City must shoulder. We can not absorb the cost that rightfully should be borne by this City. You can not expect to receive first-rate child care on second-rate reimbursements.

Last year a center was forced to close its doors. I am sure there were many reasons underlying that failure, but it 's possible that the loss of income following from years of serving low income families at an insufficient rate of reimbursement contributed to its insolvency. It stands to reason that the centers that serve the largest number of low income children run the largest deficits. How long can these centers maintain quality and stay in business?

You have long challenged us to provide quality child care in order to prepare these children for school. But in asking for a high standard of quality comes the responsibility to reimburse centers at the cost it takes to provide it.

You have set the bar high. You have asked and we have delivered an excellent private system of quality child care.

There are many affluent families in Alexandria that can afford to pay the market rate. What incentive is there to serve low income families when the cost differential can be \$150 a month and \$1,800 a year? That money comes right out of the pocket of our teachers who already are paid near the bottom of the pay scale in America.

So what in principal are we asking? We need a reimbursement rate that lets us pay fair wages and thus retain the skilled and talented workforce needed to provide quality child care. We are not trying to gold-plate the service or even tin-plate it.

We are trying to keep what has taken 20 years to build up. The City's history of commitment to quality early childhood programs is evidenced by the Children's Fund and the Early Childhood Commission. But it is not enough. There remains the very present and serious issue of insufficient reimbursement rates which, in combination with a low eligibility scale threatens to undermine the work of the past.

The scale has tipped in Alexandria. Because the City subsidy is insufficient, the child care teacher is forced to pay the balance in even lower wages. That is wrong and the system is breaking.

Respectfully, we need your help.

We are asking the City Council of Alexandria to raise the preschool reimbursement rate and the eligibility ceiling to that of the level of Fairfax County: from \$145 per week to \$161 per week and from 185% of poverty to 250% of poverty.

Thank you.

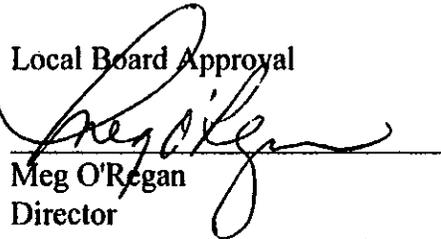
**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
CHILD DAY CARE FEE SYSTEM**

**MAXIMUM MONTHLY INCOME LEVEL
6/1/2001 - 5/31/2002**

% of Poverty Level	NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS								%FEE
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
0 - 70	0-501	0-677	0-853	0-1029	0-1206	0-1381	0-1558	0-1734	1%
71 - 100	502-716	678-968	854-1219	1030-1471	1207-1723	1382-1974	1559-2226	1735-2478	2.5%
101 - 130	717-938	969-1258	1220-1584	1472-1912	1724-2239	1975-2566	2227-2893	2479-3221	5%
131 - 150	939-1074	1259-1452	1585-1828	1913-2206	2240-2584	2567-2961	2894-3339	3222-3717	7.5%
151 - 170	1075-1217	1453-1645	1829-2072	2207-2500	2585-2929	2962-3355	3340-3784	3718-4212	10%
171 - 185	1218-1324	1646-1790	2073-2255	2501-2721	2930-3187	3356-3652	3785-4118	4213-4583	12.5%

MINIMUM FEE IS \$25.00

Local Board Approval


Meg O'Regan

Director

Department of Human Services

April 16, 2001

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administrative burden on localities.

2. Alternate Fee Scales

The Department will consider requests from localities to deviate from the standard fee schedule on a case by case basis. The Department expects to approve those alternate fee schedules/pilot programs which do not result in a higher cost per case. Requests for deviation which would serve fewer families or result in a higher cost per case will be considered only upon submission of adequate justification. Any alternate fee schedules or descriptions of pilot programs will be submitted to HHS upon approval by the Department.

STATE SLIDING FEE SCALE FOR CHILD DAY CARE

Maximum Monthly Income Level
6/1/2001 - 5/31/2002

Family Size	Monthly Poverty Guidelines	GROUP I 150% of Poverty	GROUP II 160% of Poverty	GROUP III 185% of Poverty
1	\$ 716	\$ 1,074	\$ 1,146	\$ 1,324
2	\$ 968	\$ 1,451	\$ 1,549	\$ 1,790
3	\$ 1,219	\$ 1,829	\$ 1,950	\$ 2,255
4	\$ 1,471	\$ 2,206	\$ 2,354	\$ 2,721
5	\$ 1,723	\$ 2,584	\$ 2,757	\$ 3,187
6	\$ 1,974	\$ 2,961	\$ 3,158	\$ 3,652
7	\$ 2,226	\$ 3,339	\$ 3,562	\$ 4,118
8	\$ 2,478	\$ 3,716	\$ 3,965	\$ 4,583

For each additional person, add \$252.

E. SLIDING FEE SCALE

Recipients of TANF shall not be required to pay fees.

All other recipients of child care subsidy pay a fee, except the fee system recipients in the Head Start To Work program whose income is at or below the federal poverty level.

Unless a local alternative scale is approved, the sliding fee scale established by the State Board of Social Services shall be used for determining fees owed by parents under the Transitional and Fee System Programs.

1. State Sliding Fee Scale

Unless a local alternative scale is approved, the sliding fee scale established by the State Board of Social Services shall be used statewide for determining fees owed by parents under the Transitional and Fee System programs. Fees will be 10% of gross income.

Localities are grouped by local median income with some adjustments made for actual cost of care. In using the statewide fee scale on page 29, determine first which group your locality falls into (Group I, II and III). All parents with income receiving sliding fee scale subsidy must contribute towards the cost of their child day care, with the exception of those in the Head Start To Work program whose income is at or below the federal poverty level. There is a minimum fee of \$25 a month for all parents with income.

Localities may limit receipt of fee system program subsidies to a maximum of five years. The 60 months do not have to be consecutive. Each family receiving a fee system subsidy shall be given at least 12 months notice before the five year limit is imposed. Receipt of fee system subsidy in another locality may impact the total number of months of receipt of day care subsidy. Receipt of Transitional child day care does not count toward the five years.

Agencies have the option of assisting parents with the payment of the day care fee as determined by the sliding fee scale using local only funds. Local policy for the subsidy of parent fees shall be approved by the local board of social services and recorded in the minutes. Local policy governing subsidy for parent fees shall be applied uniformly.

Agencies may prorate the fee when a partial month of care is all that is needed. Prorating the fee is an option and may be limited to the first and last month of subsidy to lessen the

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Appendix J

METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA GROUPINGS

FIPS	LOCALITY	INCOME CAP GROUP
001	Accomack	I
005	Alleghany	I
007	Amelia	I
009	Amherst	I
011	Appomattox	I
015	Augusta	I
017	Bath	I
019	Bedford County/City	I
021	Bland	I
023	Botetourt	I
520	Bristol	I
025	Brunswick	I
027	Buchanan	I
029	Buckingham	I
031	Campbell	I
033	Caroline	I
035	Carroll	I
037	Charlotte	I
560	Clifton Forge	I
580	Covington	I
045	Craig	I
049	Cumberland	I
590	Danville	I

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051	Dickenson	I
057	Essex	I
063	Floyd	I
067	Franklin County	I
620	Franklin City	I
069	Frederick County	I
640	Galax	I
071	Giles	I
077	Grayson	I
081	Greensville/Emporia	I
083	Halifax	I
660	Harrisonburg	I
089	Henry	I
091	Highland	I
097	King & Queen	I
101	King William	I
103	Lancaster	I
105	Lee	I
109	Louisa	I
111	Lunenburg	I
680	Lynchburg	I
113	Madison	I
690	Martinsville	I
117	Mecklenburg	I
119	Middlesex	I
121	Montgomery	I
125	Nelson	I
131	Northampton	I

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133	Northumberland	I
720	Norton	I
135	Nottoway	I
137	Orange	I
139	Page	I
141	Patrick	I
143	Pittsylvania	I
147	Prince Edward	I
155	Pulaski	I
750	Radford	I
157	Rappahanock	I
159	Richmond County	I
770	Roanoke	I
161	Roanoke County	I
163	Rockbridge/Buena Vista/Lexington	I
165	Rockingham	I
167	Russell	I
169	Scott	I
171	Shenandoah	I
173	Smyth	I
175	Southampton	I
790	Staunton	I
181	Surry	I
183	Sussex	I
185	Tazewell	I
191	Washington	I
820	Waynesboro	I
193	Westmoreland	I

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840	Winchester	I
195	Wise	I
197	Wythe	I
003	Albemarle	II
036	Charles City	II
540	Charlottesville	II
041	Chesterfield/Colonial Heights	II
550	Chesapeake	II
053	Dinwiddie	II
065	Fluvanna	II
073	Gloucester	II
075	Goochland	II
079	Greene	II
650	Hampton	II
085	Hanover	II
087	Henrico	II
670	Hopewell	II
093	Isle of Wight	II
095	James City	II
115	Mathews	II
127	New Kent	II
700	Newport News	II
710	Norfolk	II
730	Petersburg	II
740	Portsmouth	II
145	Powhatan	II
149	Prince George	II

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770	Richmond City	II
800	Suffolk	II
810	Virginia Beach	II
830	Williamsburg	II
199	York-Poquoson	II
510	Alexandria	III
013	Arlington	III
043	Clarke	III
047	Culpeper	III
059	Fairfax City/County	III
061	Fauquier	III
630	Fredericksburg	III
099	King George	III
107	Loudoun	III
683	Manassas City	III
685	Manassas Park	III
153	Prince William	III
177	Spotsylvania	III
179	Stafford	III
187	Warren	III

FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA
CCAP INCOME GUIDELINES: EFFECTIVE 02/01/2002

Attachment 4

		NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS									% of GMI Parent Pays Toward Child Care	
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1 child	2 children
STATE FUNDED		0 to 1059	0 to 1308	0 to 1557	0 to 1806	0 to 2056	0 to 2102	0 to 2149	0 to 2196	0 to 2242	2.5	4.0%
STATE FUNDED		1060 to 1210	1309 to 1495	1558 to 1780	1807 to 2065	2057 to 2349	2103 to 2403	2150 to 2456	2197 to 2510	2243 to 2563	4.5	6.0%
STATE FUNDED		1211 to 1361	1496 to 1682	1781 to 2002	2066 to 2323	2350 to 2643	2404 to 2703	2457 to 2763	2511 to 2824	2564 to 2883	6.5	8.0%
STATE FUNDED		1362 to 1513	1683 to 1869	2003 to 2225	2324 to 2581	2644 to 2937	2704 to 3003	2764 to 3070	2825 to 3137	2884 to 3204	7.5	9.0%
STATE FUNDED		1514 to 1664	1870 to 2056	2226 to 2447	2582 to 2839	2938 to 3231	3004 to 3303	3071 to 3377	3138 to 3451	3205 to 3524	8.5	10.0%
185% Poverty Inc	185%	1665 to 1790	2057 to 2255	2448 to 2721	2840 to 3187	3232 to 3652	3304 to 4118	3378 to 4583	3452 to 5049	3525 to 5515	9.5	10.0%
LOCAL FUNDED		1791 to 1966	2256 to 2430	2722 to 2892	3188 to 3355	3653 to 3818	4119 to 4128	4584 to 4822	5050 to 5220	5516 to 5617	10.5	12.0%
LOCAL FUNDED		1967 to 2118	2431 to 2616	2893 to 3115	3356 to 3613	3819 to 4111	4129 to 4205	4823 to 5060	5221 to 5390	5618 to 5719	11.5	13.0%
LOCAL FUNDED		2119 to 2269	2617 to 2803	3116 to 3337	3614 to 3871	4112 to 4405	4206 to 4505	5061 to 5298	5391 to 5560	5720 to 5821	12.5	14.0%
LOCAL FUNDED		2270 to 2421	2804 to 2990	3338 to 3560	3872 to 4129	4406 to 4699	4506 to 4805	5299 to 5535	5561 to 5729	5822 to 5922	13.5	15.0%
LOCAL FUNDED		2422 to 2844	2991 to 3514	3561 to 4183	4130 to 4851	4700 to 5521	4806 to 5647	5536 to 5772	5730 to 5898	5923 to 6023	14.5	16.0%
MINIMUM FEE \$30.10 MTHLY \$7.00 WKLY											C:\My Documents\ Income Chart Feb 2002.doc	

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