

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 7, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: RECEIPT OF THE FY 2002 - 2003 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

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**ISSUE:** City Council receipt of the Fiscal Year 2002 - 2003 Annual Report of the Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC).

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council receive the report, which covers the activities of the Economic Opportunities Commission over a two year period from July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2003.

**DISCUSSION:** The Economic Opportunities Commission was established in 1966 to advise the Council on issues affecting low-income residents of the City. The 18-member body provides oversight for those programs and services of the Office of Community Services in the Department of Human Services that provide emergency services, promote self-sufficiency and improve conditions of poverty. The attached report summarizes the work of the Commission over a two year period. Highlights include:

- a work session with Council and follow-up on the recommendations offered in, *"Living from Paycheck to Paycheck: A Look at Alexandria's Working Poor"*, researched and presented in conjunction with the Alexandria United Way;
- a public forum on affordable housing and economic security held in November 2002;
- continued support of the Earned Income Tax Credit campaign and tax assistance program with the Social Services Advisory Board;
- regular program briefings;
- collaboration with community groups and other boards and commissions;
- advocacy for low-income and target populations; and
- support for state legislative and budget initiatives that promote the interests of low-income people.

Appendix I to the report is a summary of the service activity of the Office of Community Services during the 2002-2003 program years.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** None.

**ATTACHMENTS:** Attachment I: FY 2002 - 2003 EOC Annual Report

**STAFF:** Nelson Smith, Director, OCS, Department of Human Services  
Jack Powers, Director, Division of Community Programs  
Debra Collins, Director, Department of Human Services

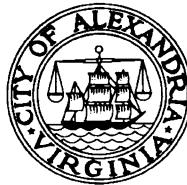
**ATTACHMENT I**

**FY 2002-2003 ANNUAL REPORT OF**

**THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION**

**PRESENTED TO THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL**

**JANUARY 27, 2004**



**MAYOR WILLIAM D. EUILLE  
VICE MAYOR REDELLA S. PEPPER  
COUNCILMAN LUDWIG P. GAINES  
COUNCILMAN ROB KRUPICKA  
COUNCILMAN ANDREW H. MACDONALD  
COUNCILMAN PAUL C. SMEDBERG  
COUNCILWOMAN JOYCE WOODSON**

**PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) was created by City Council in 1966. In general, EOC's mission is to serve as an advocate for Alexandria's low-income residents, advise the City Council on programs for these residents, and provide guidance and oversight of the Office of Community Services (OCS) in the conduct of the programs designed to serve low-income and other special populations. The EOC is comprised of 18 members with one-third of its members consisting of elected officials or their representatives appointed by the City Council, one-third of its members consisting of representatives of the poor, and one-third of its members representing business, religious, welfare or other private sector groups and organizations.

EOC and OCS comprise the Community Action Agency for Alexandria. Community Action goals are to promote self-sufficiency for low-income persons, alleviate conditions of poverty, improve the conditions under which low-income persons work and live, and ensure that low-income individuals have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

To help achieve these goals, OCS offers a variety of programs and services involving crisis intervention through the Community Services Block Grant, comprehensive services for the homeless and prevention for the near homeless, seasonal energy assistance through the Virginia Energy Assistance Program, bi-lingual and bi-cultural services for recent immigrants and newcomers, and services for ex-offenders through the Virginia Community Action Re-entry System (VA CARES). A profile of each program area appears as an appendix to this report.

## **HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR FISCAL YEARS 2002 AND 2003**

To fulfill its mission, the EOC undertook a variety of activities during Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003 including: providing program oversight, providing support to children of low income families, monitoring legislative and budget issues, advocacy for target populations, coordination and partnering with other community groups and organizations. A major highlight during the fiscal year was the publication of the joint study by the EOC and Alexandria's United Way entitled, *Living from Paycheck to Paycheck: A Look at Alexandria's Working Poor*.

### **Program Oversight**

The EOC continued its initiative, started in fiscal year 1997, to receive monthly briefings on the progress of OCS initiatives and programs. As result of this initiative, the Commission receives extensive background and outcome information on services to low-income residents. This initiative improves the Commission's program knowledge and oversight, allowing the EOC to better assess if the needs of low-income residents are being met by OCS programs and services and if any unmet needs exist. To supplement its program oversight responsibilities, during fiscal year 2002, the EOC invited the community-based prosecutor assigned to the Arlandria area to

discuss the community-based prosecutor program initiated by Alexandria's Commonwealth Attorney.

During Fiscal Year 2003, the EOC invited a member of Alexandria's Homeless Services Coordinating Committee to discuss the Committee's strategic priorities. The top priorities of the HSCC are to establish a 7 to 8 bed Safe Haven facility for difficult-to-serve homeless individuals, single room occupancy housing for low-income workers and to maintain the existing transitional housing units. EOC also hosted a division chief from Alexandria's Office of Housing to discuss City-sponsored home ownership programs.

To better perform its oversight responsibilities during Fiscal Year 2003 EOC members took part in a training session on Results Oriented Management. The seminar was arranged and funded by the Virginia Department of Social Services for Community Action Agencies throughout the Commonwealth. This training will better prepare the EOC to focus on program outcomes as opposed to program activities.

On November 2, 2002 the EOC hosted a public hearing to gain knowledge on housing and economic security issues affecting Alexandrians, with particular focus on the economic challenges that followed the tragic events of September 11, 2001. From the affordable housing perspective, information was presented on (a) the Wesley Housing Corporation – Carpenter's Shelter partnership to maintain affordable housing and provide transitional units at Lynhaven Gardens, (b) the operations of, and services provided by, Carpenter's Shelter and the City to preserve and create affordable housing opportunities, (c) employment and training programs offered by JobLink, and (d) the impact of September 11 on the services provided by the Department of Human Services. Information from the public hearing was invaluable in helping the EOC develop its work plan and to better address the budgetary and program issues affecting programs for low-income and other special populations.

### **Support to Children of Low-Income Families**

During FY 2002 - 2003, the EOC continued the initiative of providing support to low-income children in conjunction with OCS intake staff and the Fund for Alexandria's Child. A fund-raising effort among representative organizations and the EOC membership raised over \$700 to sponsor summer camp placements and Holiday Sharing opportunities for youth.

### **Monitoring of Legislative and Budgetary Issues**

During Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003, the EOC monitored federal and state legislative initiatives and budget amendments with potential impact on the Community Services Block Grant and other Community Action programs. In addition, the EOC testified before the Alexandria delegation to the General Assembly on budget and programmatic issues (January 2002 and January 2003). It also proposed several items to be included in the City's legislative package for the 2002 and 2003 General Assembly: (1) a refundable Virginia Earned Income Tax Credit (VEITC), (2)

extension of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) transitional benefits for a second year, (3) increased eligibility guidelines (up to 200 percent of poverty levels) for subsidized child care in the Northern Virginia region, (4) increased funding to supplement the state share of the Community Services Block Grant, (5) restoration of civil rights for ex-felons, and (6) restoration of funding for Project Discovery.

During Fiscal Year 2003, the EOC played an active role in the City's budget process through testimony at City Council public hearings. In November 2002, the EOC testified at the City Council's public hearing on the Fiscal Year 2004 budget process and in April 2003 testified at a City Council public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2004 budget to discuss key issues raised at EOC's November public hearing on affordable housing and economic security.

### **Advocacy**

An important role of the Commission is to take supportive positions on major issues affecting the low-income community. A primary way EOC fulfills this role is through the designated seats EOC members hold on the Human Rights Commission, the Early Childhood Commission, and the Fair Housing Testing Advisory Committee.

Housing issues consumed a major portion of the Commissions advocacy efforts during Fiscal Year 2002. For example, the Commission testified before the City Council during its November 17, 2001, public hearing on the report by the Affordable Housing Task Force. Also, the Commission played an active role in the discussions on the redevelopment of the Samuel Madden homes, use of the Hope VI grant funds, the location of public housing, and relocation of the former residents of Samuel Madden by participating the numerous public/community meetings and planning and design workshops sponsored by Alexandria's Redevelopment and Housing Authority between February and June 2003. In addition, the Commission testified at the June 24, 2002, joint public hearing conducted by the City Council and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority on public housing sites.

On October 1, 2002, the EOC testified at the Early Childhood Commission's public hearing. EOC commented on the childcare issues and recommendations in its June 2001 report *Living form Paycheck to Paycheck: A Look Alexandria's Working Poor*. On January 5, 2003, the EOC made a presentation to the Alexandria Landlord-Tenant Relations Board regarding housing issues from the report and the public hearing on affordable housing and economic security.

### **Coordination and Partnerships**

EOC took part in the work of Alexandria's Youth Policy Commission and the Alexandria United Way's Human Services Committee. EOC partnered with Alexandria's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to cosponsor the third Affordable Housing Exchange on November 10, 2001. The purpose of the Exchange was to bring representatives from various Alexandria Boards and Commissions together to network and exchange their ideas and concepts on affordable

housing issues affecting each group's target population. The ultimate goal was to identify and discuss the concerns and perspectives the individual Boards and Commissions have regarding affordable housing, determine where they overlap and how to advance the issue in a collaborative manner.

#### **FUTURE WORK OF THE EOC**

During fiscal year 2004, in addition to continuing ongoing activities of program oversight, monitoring legislative and budget issues, advocacy, and community partnerships, the membership expects to develop new strategies from a November 2003 retreat that will help to frame priority issues for the coming year.

## **PROFILE OF PROGRAMS IN THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

The Office of Community Services (OCS) provides a variety of programs, services and activities to promote self-sufficiency and improve the lives of Alexandria's low-income residents. For purposes of this discussion, these programs, services, and activities are grouped into three areas: crisis intervention, homeless services, and ex-offender services.

### **CRISIS INTERVENTION**

The federal and State Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), supplemented by local general funds, supports intake services, crisis intervention, emergency assistance and community outreach efforts. Housing, shelter, food, fuel, medical, transportation and other emergency assistance is provided to eligible low-income residents of the City. State and local general funds are used in conjunction with financial assistance from local churches and charities to preserve existing housing for eligible families facing short-term financial crises.

Emergency services and crisis intervention changed dramatically in the months following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Thousands of workers in the region felt the impact of reduced business travel, tourism, consumer uncertainty and an economy struggling to recover. The economic uncertainty resulted in lay-offs and reduced work schedules that are still felt in some areas of the workforce. Spurred in part by the terrorist attacks and the slow recovery, the emergency services caseload increased by 25% in FY 2002. OCS crisis intervention programs assisted 4,596 individuals in 2,289 low-income households in the year ending June 30, 2002. The Community Services Unit solicited \$143,650 from Alexandria's faith-based charitable network to meet emergency needs.

The community was quick to respond to the growing economic crisis in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Community Services staff referred families to The Salvation Army, ALIVE!, Catholic Charities and other organizations providing financial assistance to secondary victims of the Pentagon attack with private funds and grants from the United Way of the National Capital Area and the Presbyterian Church. City Council established the Community Support Fund that received over \$16,000 in local corporate and individual donations. The Community Support Fund assisted 20 families impacted by the attack who exhausted other public and private assistance or whose full needs were not met by the existing programs.

In FY 2003, the emergency services program continued to experience high demand and an increased caseload. CSBG funded emergency services assisted 4,804 persons in 2,450 households during the year ending June 30, 2003. Over 1,400 of the households received services on multiple occasions. The increase in need was complicated by a significant drop in giving to OCS' charitable partners in the community. ALIVE!, Inc. was forced to strictly budget funds on a monthly basis, closing when the threshold was reached each month. Catholic

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Charities worked off weekly budgets. Solicitation of charitable funds by the Community Services staff was \$13,000, or 9% lower than in FY 2002.

The Community Services component also manages the Virginia Energy Assistance and the EnergyShare programs. EnergyShare is sponsored and funded in part by Dominion Virginia Power and is used to preserve heating sources for low-income persons facing emergencies that cannot be met by the state program. EnergyShare is also dependent on donations by corporate and residential customers. During the winter of 2001-2002, the Energy Assistance Program helped 525 low-income households heat their homes. During 2002-2003, 518 households received assistance.

The Energy Assistance Program includes a cooling assistance component for low-income households at-risk for heat related health complications associated with the region's summer weather. Eligible households receive assistance toward the purchase of air conditioning units and/or electricity costs for cooling the home. During the summer of 2001 (FY 2002) the cooling assistance component helped 168 families. During summer 2002, (FY 2003) the number of households assisted increased to 184 when the state dropped the vulnerability guidelines (age, disability, under age 3).

### HOMELESS SERVICES

OCS coordinates DHS service delivery to the homeless. Strategies and programs include homeless prevention, eviction storage, transitional housing, case management, administration of operations at the Alexandria Community Shelter (ACS), and supportive services for shelter residents.

Prevention: The Homeless Intervention Program (HIP) provides up to six months of financial support in conjunction with housing counseling and case management for families facing eviction or foreclosure as a result of circumstances beyond their control. Early in FY 2002, the state provided additional revenue to all HIP programs in the Northern Region in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack in an effort to meet increased demand on the program. Alexandria received an additional \$50,000. Even with the additional revenue, OCS was still forced to suspend applications for HIP in early March 2002 due to depletion of funding. Once HIP funds were gone, local resources from short-term prevention programs were diverted to fill the gap. During FY 2002, the HIP program helped 192 families maintain their housing using just over \$492,000 in state and local resources. Six month follow-up contact with HIP families whose assistance ended in FY 2002 found 77% were still in permanent housing.

In FY 2003, HIP funding was reduced by the state to pre-September 11 levels. By early in January 2003 (approximately 6 months into the program year), most of the \$263,931 in state funding and \$100,000 local general fund allocated to supplement the effort was expended or encumbered for existing clients. New intake was suspended for the remainder of the year at that

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point. With lower revenue the number of households assisted dropped to 143. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the households were stable six months after assistance ceased.

Emergency Shelter and Support Services: During FY 2002, 389 persons (55 families and 201 single individuals) were sheltered at ACS. Forty-three percent of the households that left ACS during FY 2002 moved on to stable housing or continued in substance abuse treatment. In FY 2003, 257 persons were sheltered (25 families and 178 single individuals) and 35.5% of the households leaving the shelter moved on to stable housing or continuing treatment programs. The lower percentage of outcomes in FY 2003 is attributed to a drop in all types of placement except transitional housing and an increase in the percentage of families with no income when entering the shelter.

Crisis child care assistance is an important service utilized by the case management teams at the shelters. Services were provided for 87 children in the City during FY 2003, enabling parents to remain employed, seek employment or conduct a housing search while residing in shelter.

One-hundred and nine-teen (119) households used the transitional assistance program in FY 2002 to establish new permanent housing arrangements. This number grew to 145 households in FY 2003. While many families relocated directly from shelters, the increase is attributed to families leaving overcrowded situations or facing imminent displacement.

OCS continued its long-standing working relationship with Carpenter's Shelter. Staff from several City agencies, in addition to DHS, participate in a comprehensive case management partnership with shelter staff. Carpenter's Shelter receives financial support for operating costs through the City's competitive Community Partnership Fund for Human Services. The City also provides federal and local financial support through the OCS budget for Carpenter's management of the emergency overnight winter shelter program.

### EX-OFFENDER SERVICES

The Virginia Community Action Re-Entry System (Virginia CARES) provides transitional services and counseling to ex-offenders returning to Alexandria from the state correctional system, and to their families. In FY 2002, 81 new participants were enrolled in the program and a total of 237 new and ongoing clients and family members received services. In FY 2003, 101 new participants enrolled and a total of 272 participants and family members received services. Basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing and transportation are addressed immediately. Long range goals concentrate on employment, self-sufficiency and non-recidivism. Follow-up contacts made one year after enrollment with FY 2001 participants found none re-incarcerated on new felony charges in FY 2002 although 7 were returned for parole or probation violations.

Primary funding for the program was provided by a state grant administered by the Department of Criminal Justice Services until December 2002. At that point, all state general funds

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supporting the program were recalled in response to the state budget crisis and replaced by federal grant funding passed through the state. The federal grant requires a 25% match, escalating to 50% in FY 2005 and 75% in FY 2006, the last year of the award. Virginia CARES board members from across the state are working with the Virginia CARES central administrative staff to get state funding restored. A request for restoration of funding is included in the City's legislative package and has the backing of Alexandria's General Assembly delegation.