



CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

To be a place where everyone thrives

Human Rights Commission
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August 29, 2025

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 our annual planning meeting on March 22nd, 2025, Commissioners identified “Housing Access and Stability Across Protected Classes and Economic Status” as the primary focus of our work in 2025. 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 across protected classes and socioeconomic statuses.

At its regular meeting on August 21st, 2025, the Commission voted to recommend the following housing-related legislative priorities for your consideration as Council prepares its legislative recommendations for the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission for referral to the General Assembly. The Commission recommends that Council support enabling legislation related to the following key areas:

1. Tenant Rights and Protections:

- **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 in eviction cases.**
- **Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to remove barriers to tenants enforcing the right to habitability.** Under current law, a tenant must follow often lengthy procedures and be up to date on all rent payments before suing a landlord for conditions that make their homes uninhabitable.
- **Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to increase transparency during the tenant screening process** by requiring landlords to list minimum criteria before accepting applications and provide reasons for a tenant’s application denial.

- **Reinstate 14-day pay or quit notices.** Under current law, after a tenant is five days late in paying rent, a landlord can issue a five-day "pay or quit" notice requiring the tenant to pay full rent or face eviction proceedings. By extending the five-day "pay or quit" window to fourteen days, tenants have a better chance of accessing funds and avoiding housing instability and homelessness.
- **Increase protections against landlord retaliation** by including non-renewal of leases as a form of prohibited landlord retaliation against those who have filed complaints of discrimination.
- **Require that critical lease information be made available in languages other than English.**

2. Excessive Rental Costs:

- **Limit fees for rental applications and/or allow groups of tenants to submit a single application.**
- **Require landlords to disclose to prospective rental applicants a complete list of additional fees** involved in renting as a separate document prior to tenant application.
- **Support enabling legislation to allow for local rent stabilization to prevent price gouging** and resultant housing instability and displacement.

3. Increased Funding for Affordable Housing and Housing Assistance:

- **Increase funding and make permanent the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot Program (VERP).** Established in 2020 to support the creation of local/regional coordinated systems to prevent evictions, this program provides local organizations with resources to help families access emergency financial assistance, case management, and court navigation.
- **Establish statewide pilot program funded at \$60 million annually for two years** to provide rental assistance for 5,000 very low-income families across Virginia.
- **Increase annual funding for Virginia Housing Trust Fund (VHTF) from \$87.5 million to \$150 million.** The VHTF provides loans to create, preserve, and support affordable housing, and provides grants targeted at reducing homelessness.

4. Expansion of Local Authority:

- **Amend the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to allow localities to sue landlords** who fail to maintain health and safety standards of rental units.
- **Grant localities right of first refusal during the sale of publicly-supported affordable housing.** This would ensure localities have the opportunity to purchase affordable housing before it expires.

5. Homelessness & Wraparound Services:

- **Require that each county and city in Virginia maintain a public overnight homeless shelter or fund a private equivalent.**
- **Support the expansion of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)** for people with disabilities and others with complex needs.

- **Support comprehensive probation reform bills that offer increased housing support** and services to aid in successful re-entry of those exiting incarceration.
- **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.
- **Support the passage of a Homeless Bill of Rights** codifying the right of unhoused individuals to move freely in public spaces; to receive equal treatment by state and municipal authorities; to maintain employment, privacy, and personal property; and to vote.
- **Increase public mental health care funding.**

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,



Heather Roberson Gaston
Chair
Charlottesville Human Rights Commission