

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF INCREASES HOUSING SUPPORT FOR RICHMOND RESIDENTS:

TO: President Kristen Nye, and members of the Richmond City Council

FROM: *Michelle Ingram*

POSITION: *Propose*

DATE: *May 28, 2024*

Good evening, My name is Michelle Ingram and I am an active member of New Virginia Majority.

New Virginia Majority (NVM), represents and advocates for laws and measures that support and benefit working families in Richmond and across the state of Virginia. As a non profit organization that engages in the organizing and support of working families, we know first-hand the difficulty that they face every day. NVM strongly proposes the following measures/actions be taken to support working families here in Richmond in the face of this very real housing crisis.

The housing crisis in Richmond is rapidly becoming one of the worst in the entire country. Over 13,000 evictions were filed in the city in 2023. Researchers estimate that in the past year, 23 evictions have been filed in Richmond for every 100 renter households, giving Richmond the second highest eviction rate in the U.S.

This eviction crisis is being fueled by skyrocketing rents. The average Richmonder pays \$325 more in rent today than they did in 2020. Over half of Richmond renters are now cost-burdened and pay over 30% of their income in rent – that's higher than New York city, Chicago, San Francisco, or Washington D.C.

In addition, the measures the City has taken to provide utility assistance, eviction protection, and to uphold maintenance issues are simply not robust enough. I know this all too well, personally dealing with a mold infested apartment for over 8 months. This experience has resulted in my son being hospitalized over 28 times, his longest stay being 11 weeks. I am only one of many, as you can see. Despite officially declaring an affordable housing crisis in April 2023, Richmond City Council has not yet taken action to address the urgent needs of the thousands of renters and tenants who will face unaffordable rents and the threat of eviction this year.

For these reasons, we are calling for the following measures by the City Council to be considered for implementation during next year's budget cycle:

1.) We need emergency rental and utility assistance available to all Richmond residents. Increased funding for utility assistance and an expanded window to apply for assistance all year and to all residents (regardless of immigrant status, criminal history, eviction status).

2.) We need to stop evictions before they happen. Increased eviction protection that is more transparent, removes the need for landlord approval before assistance can be received, removes the need for an eviction to be filed before assistance can be requested, and is available to all residents regardless of immigration status, eviction status, and criminal history.

3.) We need safe, healthy, and dignified housing – free from roaches, mold, water leaks, and broken appliances, and we also support the Implementation of the Rental Inspection Program that is currently being considered by the City Council.

We believe that having these items be considered between now and the next budget cycle will give the City time to consider our reasonable request and to determine the best course of action, which we are hoping will be to support our requests.

City residents urge the City Council to take immediate action to assist residents going through the housing crisis.

Please contact Boaz Young-EL, 804-590-6980, if you have any additional questions.