

## Housing Discrimination Subcommittee notes 7/15/19

Below is a recap of the Tenant-Landlord Commission's (TLC) Housing Discrimination Subcommittee meeting which took place on 7/15/19 from 7:03 PM until 8:20 PM with Nicole Harmon, Bismah Ahmed, Kirit Mookerjee, Bryan Jackson, Vanessa Street, and Kellen MacBeth in attendance:

- **Meeting Change** - Kellen asked if the subcommittee members were amenable to changing the meeting date to accommodate one of the member's schedule and all agreed to meet the first Wednesday after each TLC meeting. The next subcommittee meeting will be on Wednesday, September 18th at 7 PM.
- **FHAIR Research/Outreach Update** - Kellen relayed that he has met with two landlords, the Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Apartment Association (NVAA), and has corresponded with additional landlords to try and schedule meetings to discuss how the source of income (SOI) housing discrimination proposal may impact them and their comfort level with the policy. Michael Pruitt has also participated in some of these meetings. They are using an identical script with the individual landlords to make sure they are capturing the same information. He plans to consolidate all of the information collected over the coming months and distribute it to the TLC. Initially, he noted that there seem to be a number of misconceptions about the Housing Choice Voucher program and while one of the landlords was comfortable with the FHAIR proposal, the others were opposed. Opposing reasons ranged from financial, to concerns about government regulations, to concerns about the quality of the tenants participating in the program. Bismah is also reaching out to several of the AOBA members to have them come to an upcoming TLC meeting and express their views. They were unable to attend the last TLC meeting but she hopes they will be able to attend the next one in September. Kellen suggested that they may also want to come to the Housing Discrimination subcommittee meetings to express feedback. Kellen noted that the outreach to landlords and other impacted/interested individuals and groups will continue for the coming months before the proposal comes again before the TLC for consideration. Kirit has also reached out to an organization that he thinks has an interest in the issue.
- **Housing Matters Forum (September) Landlord Component** - Nicole said that DHS and CPHD have begun planning for the Housing Matters Forum focused on housing discrimination in September. One of the main purposes of the event will be to share data from their consultant about impediments to fair housing in Arlington. She noted that she will make sure that the TLC has a chance to review the data before the event to inform discussion. The attendees discussed how best to get landlords to attend the event. Bismah recommended including information about landlord legal responsibilities and the attendees discussed having AOBA and NVAA co-sponsor or at least advertise the event. Kellen noted that based on his limited conversations with landlords regarding SOI thus far, there seem to be very different approaches to tenant screening--some of which may open landlords up to legal challenges. Reviewing legal best practices may be helpful during the event. The attendees also discussed having separate events or at least break-out sessions for landlords and tenants. There were concerns that tenants may be less likely to voice their views/issues with landlords present and

vice versa. The group agreed that creating a climate comfortable for both landlords and tenants was key to having constructive dialogue on issues of discrimination. Nicole will let the subcommittee know how they can help with the planning in the next two months. Attendees suggested including Housing Choice Vouchers, SOI, criminal history, familial status, and Arlington's specific definitions for protected classes (which may differ from state or Federal definitions) as topics during the event. Vanessa, who administers Arlington Housing Choice Voucher program, appreciated the opportunity to learn more about landlord views and ensure that everyone had accurate information about the program. Kellen recommended that Nicole also include the Human Rights Commission and Office of Human Rights in the event planning. Nicole said that two dates were currently being considered for the event: September 25th or 26th.

- **Criminal History Housing Discrimination** - Bismah provided research from the National Apartment Association on criminal history screening of residents and landlord opposition to banning discrimination based on criminal history. She explained that for many landlords, it is not an issue of discrimination but of keeping their residents safe. Bryan, Director of Community Engagement for OAR, appreciated the opportunity to establish relationships with landlords in Arlington and learn more about their perspectives on housing individuals with criminal history. Several of the attendees said that they did not think an outright ban on considering criminal history was a good fit for Arlington. Kellen said that accepting the status quo was not a tenable solution--from his meetings with DHS, ASPAN, and OAR, a number of Arlington residents with criminal records face significant barriers to regaining housing because landlords won't rent to them. He expressed concern that the voluntary approach (some landlords accept residents with criminal history, others do not) currently in place is failing to meet the needs of former inmates who are disproportionately people of color and who end up becoming burdens on the state when they are shut out of the private housing market. While the views of attendees on the topic ranged significantly, there was agreement that additional research to identify the scope of the problem and identify potential solutions was a good way to move forward.