

CHAIR’S REPORT ON TENANT CONCERNS DURING COVID-19  
ARLINGTON TENANT-LANDLORD COMMISSION  
July 29, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have profound impacts on the health and wellbeing of Arlington residents. The economic fallout has led to rapid unemployment and loss of income for thousands of residents. While eviction proceedings were suspended in Arlington from March through June, over 3,500 residents reported being unable to continue paying rent and are at risk of eviction now that court proceedings have resumed. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, a group of residents along Columbia Pike organized a ‘Cancel the Rent’ protest followed by another protest on June 12<sup>th</sup>. Recognizing the tremendous anxiety tenants must feel in order to organize a protest during a pandemic, I reached out to the organizations involved and other tenant organizations to learn more about the issues they have faced and share information about the county’s relief efforts.

ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED (MAY – JUNE 2020)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenants and Workers United</li> <li>• Asian/Pacific Islander Civic Engagement (ACE) Collaborative / Asians for Affordable Housing in Virginia</li> <li>• La CollectiVA</li> <li>• New Virginia Majority</li> <li>• Bonder &amp; Amanda Johnson CDC</li> </ul>

The following table summarizes information from these meetings.

CONCERN	DESCRIPTION
Lack of knowledge about available programs	Some tenants still do not know about eviction prevention and rental assistance programs available to Arlington County residents.
Fear about using government assistance	Some tenants, especially undocumented immigrants, have been fearful of reaching out to the county for help.
Unknown impact of aid on immigration status	Tenants found it challenging to determine if they were eligible for county aid and how it might impact their immigration status under the Federal public charge rule, especially international students, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants.
Language barriers on the county website and on the phone	Some tenants have had trouble accessing information about available aid on the county website because they do not read English. Others have encountered challenges on the phone attempting to get aid and finding reliable translation support.
Long phone wait times or no follow-up	Some tenants who have applied for support from the county have experienced long wait times over the phone and others reported that no one called them back when they could not get through.
Cultural preferences	Some tenants are uncomfortable asking the government for help and prefer to go to friends or family for support.
Feel shut-out of decision-making process	Many of the organizations said that while the county has attempted to inform them of available programs, there have been few or no attempts to consult low-income tenants in order to determine what programs should be provided and how they should function.
Feel underrepresented in commissions	Some of the organizations said that they don’t feel represented in the decision-making process and that many of the commissions are not representative of the diverse community and are mostly made up of white residents.