

April 8, 2010

Good evening, Chairman Bulova and members of the Board of Supervisors.

I'm Janey George, President of the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area. I speak on behalf of the League membership in Fairfax County.

The League understands that this has been another difficult fiscal year. We do not envy you the task of facing this year's budget choices. We'd like to thank the Board for choosing to advertise a tax rate increase of 8 cents and an additional vehicle licensing fee, even though those are difficult political choices. We would also support a meals tax.

Now that the time has come to choose whether to implement those taxes and fees, the League would like to join the chorus of other voices in the county urging the supervisors to make the service cuts less drastic than those initially proposed by raising the tax rate and implementing the auto licensing fee.

Among the issues we are particularly concerned about are cuts in mental health services. We've all seen over time the violent or heart-rending consequences of untreated mental health needs. Often those receiving these services are the most vulnerable in society but least able to advocate for themselves. The budget proposals seem to include many regrettable cuts in alcohol and drug treatment, but the elimination of the emergency mental health services in north and south county seem to be the most egregious. This is a large county and eliminating such services would likely guarantee that some people in crisis will go without treatment; these disturbed individuals, their families and our community will experience the consequences.

Elimination of the Gang Prevention Coordinator seems like a very short-sighted way to save money. The anti-gang initiatives have been reasonably successful and this is no time to decrease the effort. The League also believes that middle school resource officers have played a vital role in decreasing gang recruitment in Fairfax County Public Schools. Please restore the middle school resource officers and the gang prevention coordinator position.

We'd like to see more resources going toward public transportation, not cuts in Fairfax Connector service. Public transit needs to be more convenient and reliable than ever to get automobiles off the roads. There may be some justifiable bus service cuts based on low ridership at certain times of day, but it is impossible to believe that so many cuts and route eliminations are justified. One way or another funding must be found for public transit routes that serve the community. We also would like to see the Metro transfer increased by Fairfax County and all jurisdictions that benefit from the system, so that service cuts are not needed. Metro needs to be adequately funded to maintain current facilities in top working condition so it can absorb upcoming expansion to Tysons and Wiehle Avenue.

Fairfax County citizens make heavy use of their libraries, especially now during this recession. Alternate day library hours may make sense to budget cutters but it drives citizens crazy trying to remember what is open which day. Libraries are already heavily used so it is hard to imagine them absorbing the extra usage resulting from having some libraries closed during usual

operating hours. We do understand the need for budget cuts, but anything that can be done to minimize the hours of service cuts will be appreciated.

The parks budget has also been targeted again for serious cuts with some facilities closed, fewer interpretive services, and much less frequent maintenance of those still open. Anything that can be done to minimize these cuts will be appreciated by county citizens.

The proposed budget eliminates the staff position for the Commission for Women (CFW). This position cut would severely impact the work of the CFW. The CFW would not be able to host the Women's Voices Forum, continue the surveys, support partnerships, develop policies, or provide the information and education on issues important to women and girls. The elimination of all staff support of the Commission for Women is likely to seriously hinder its effectiveness in advocating for the needs of women and girls in this community.

We haven't yet mentioned cuts to public schools. Public schools are facing increasing student enrollment and class size along with cuts to cherished programs. But elimination of all day kindergarten at some schools is totally unacceptable to the League. Research has shown that children, particularly those from disadvantaged homes, benefit educationally from full day kindergarten. In the interest of equality of opportunity, all Fairfax children should attend schools with full day kindergarten.

The county executive's budget letter suggests that cuts to the Police Department budget will result in increased response times and delayed investigations and complex case closures, among other impacts. Cuts to the Fire and Rescue Department will result in minimal specialty training for units like the Hazardous Materials and Urban Search and Rescue teams, and possibly to fire and medical response units being out of service. Do county officials think citizens are willing to put up with such declines in emergency services to save money?

We are concerned that, for the second year in a row, compensation for County and Schools employees will not be increased. We are not sure that the extra day and a half day holiday makes up for the lack of salary increases. The League appreciates the hard work by county staff that results in Fairfax County being known for its excellent services and efficient government. Staff cuts that have already occurred are putting more work on those who remain.

Our list of unacceptable cuts could go on, but we only have five minutes. There is something in this proposed budget for everyone to hate, even the conservatives on the Board. The League recognizes that this is a difficult time to raise taxes and fees when some citizens are experiencing unemployment or a decline in household income. At the same time we have heard many, many calls to maintain services and the quality of life in the county. The League advocates implementing the new fees proposed as well as considering a meals tax and voting a 1.12 tax rate in order to make the cuts less drastic than those currently proposed.

Thank you for soliciting citizen input in the budget process and for listening so patiently to citizen concerns.