



2019 Potential Policy Priority Descriptions

Housing Discrimination

The Fair Housing Act is critical to ending discriminatory housing practices and correcting the long-term effects of structural and institutional barriers to housing choice. The Virginia Fair Housing Law “makes it illegal to discriminate in residential housing on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status and disability. The law prohibits applying one standard to one class of individuals while applying a different standard to another class of individuals.” Despite the law, housing discrimination and segregation still occur in Virginia. CHACE supports adding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification protection to the state’s Fair Housing law. CHACE also supports adding “source of income” protection so that housing voucher holders cannot be rejected solely on those grounds.

Permanent Supportive Housing

With targeted investments in evidence-based homeless service delivery models, Virginia has seen a 33% decrease in homelessness since 2010 and an effective end to veteran homelessness. Yet as of January 2018, there are still around 982 Virginians experiencing chronic homelessness. Research has shown that most people who are chronically homeless need Permanent Supportive Housing in order to remain stably housed. This is especially true for individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. CHACE will support increased funding for PSH through the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the State Housing Trust Fund administered by DHCD.

Eviction Prevention/Diversion

A recent study showed several Virginia localities had some of the highest eviction rates in the country. Motivated by this data, Virginia housing advocates launched a campaign entitled CARE (Campaign to Reduce Evictions) to study the issue and identify policy solutions for the consideration of the General Assembly. These included increases to the State Housing Trust Fund, a State-funded pilot eviction prevention program, and changes to the State’s Landlord Tenant laws. The 2019 General Assembly passed numerous pieces of legislation to help address Virginia’s eviction crisis, but there’s much more work to be done. CHACE will provide candidates with information about helpful legislation enacted in other states that Virginia should consider putting into place.

Virginia Housing Trust Fund

The Virginia Housing Trust Fund is a state resource that uses public dollars to leverage private investment in housing for households with extremely low incomes. Safe, decent affordable housing is the platform for individual and family stability. As a state, we are concerned about our children's educational outcomes, the physical and mental health of our residents, healthy vibrant neighborhoods and communities, and investing in our workforce. A robust Housing Trust Fund increases our capacity to address the unmet housing needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens and provide a decent place to call home.

The Governor's budget amendments for 2018-19 and 2019-20 would have added \$19 million to the HTF. The General Assembly approved an increase of only \$3 million. CHACE supports funding for the Housing Trust Fund at \$20 million per year.

Energy Efficiency Programs

The monthly utility bill is a significant part of the average family's housing cost. For lower income households, the cost of keeping warm in the winter or cool in the summer can quickly turn housing from affordable to unaffordable. Many lower income households will need to make the choice between staying cool or paying their rent. For seniors especially, it can become a serious health and safety issue when the temperature soars. The good news is that we know how to make housing more energy efficient and we have an experienced industry capable of taking on that task – but we need to increase the number of homes that are weatherized each year.

Land Use/Inclusionary Zoning

Virginia has relatively few "inclusionary zoning" programs that are available to local governments that wish to encourage the creation of affordable housing through land use policy and regulation. Virginia's "Affordable Dwelling Unit" enabling legislation only allows mandatory programs in six jurisdictions, five of which are in Northern Virginia. The balance of the state operates under a "voluntary" approach which has not resulted in much production.

CHACE supports the expansion of "inclusionary" strategies which will give local governments more tools to address affordable housing needs. There are a wide range of best practices from across the country that are currently in use. Many of these strategies are identified in Housing Virginia's 2017 report *Welcome to the Neighborhood: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusionary Housing*.

Healthy Housing

When people are excluded from safe housing because of its cost or because they have an imperfect credit, rental or criminal history, they are often forced into homes that are unsafe or unhealthy. They may be living with mold, or pest infestation, or insufficient heat or hot water. We've also learned that housing that may seem acceptable, may have health hazards that are difficult to identify without an expert inspection. Recent studies also show that housing instability has profound mental health impacts on families, including the educational achievement of children.

CHACE supports any and all policies that encourage owners of rental housing to make sure their units remain safe and habitable, such as requiring that they pass inspections before they are leased and also support strengthening a renter's ability to enforce his or her right to safe and healthy housing through enacting policies such as warranties of habitability for rental housing. CHACE encourages programs to support greater collaboration between housing providers and healthcare organizations.

Aging In Place

Research shows that nearly 4 out of 5 people over the age of 50 plan to stay in their communities and in their homes as they age. This number doesn't change even when seniors begin to need day to day assistance or continuing health care. This desire to stay put on the part of baby boomers represents a shift from their parent's generation. Our housing stock and our neighborhood designs are ill-suited to meet this need.

Many boomers find themselves in the suburban homes where they raised their families. These are often in neighborhoods that are car-dependent – where grocery stores, pharmacies and health care resources require a trip in an automobile. The homes themselves are also frequently not suitable for residents who may be facing increasing challenges with mobility as they age. Second floor bedrooms, steep staircases, narrow doorways, bath rooms without grab bars are all examples of the types of conditions that senior face when keeping their homes safe and comfortable as they age.

CHACE supports the expansion of programs to assist seniors and persons with disabilities in making needed home modifications. This includes experts to help with home assessments as well as sources of funding to offset costs for low income households.

Virginia Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program

The federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) has been the primary funding program for affordable rental housing in the US and in Virginia since it was launched in 1986. The program supports the development of new and rehabilitated rental housing through two mechanisms. The “9%” credit provides a deeper subsidy and is administered by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) through an annual competition where the demand for credits far exceeds the supply available. The LIHTC also is available in conjunction with tax exempt bonds that are issued by housing authorities (including VHDA). These “4%” credits provide a shallower subsidy and may not work in all markets across the state without additional subsidy. The need for affordable rental housing across the state is currently not being fully met by the LIHTC. Further, Novogradac and Co. estimate that the changes to the tax law enacted in 2017 will reduce national production levels of affordable rental housing by up to 235,000 homes per year.

The LIHTC program serves households below 60% of area median income with rents that are affordable. Changes to the program last year allow for greater income mixing and will now permit households with incomes up to 80% of median if those are balanced with households at much lower levels within the same project.

CHACE is supporting the adoption of a Virginia housing credit that would be a companion to the federal credit. This would allow the federal credit to stretch further and create additional affordable apartments. The state credit would also enhance difficult to develop projects, smaller projects and rural projects that often need additional assistance to achieve feasibility. A state credit could also contribute to deeper affordability for some units in a tax credit housing development.

There are currently 14 states that offer their own housing credits as supplements to the federal program and one state with a proposed program. These state programs are designed in a variety of ways but frequently align with the federal credit while also emphasizing particular state priorities.

It is important that the state credit be designed in such a way that it can be easily taken by investors in the project and used against their state tax liability, including the ability of the credit to be bifurcated from the federal, allowing different investors for each. This was a critical flaw of an earlier, short-lived Virginia state credit program.