



Hopkins House

- A Learning Center for Children, Youth, and Families -

5904 Richmond Hwy, Suite 525, Alexandria, VA 22303

www.HopkinsHouse.org • (571) 480-4094

PUBLIC HEARING STATEMENT TO THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL

Delivered On March 14, 2016

Madam Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, City Council Members, and Mr. City Manager, my name is Julie Jakopic. I am here today representing Hopkins House, as Chair of its Board of Trustees. We would like to share a few thoughts regarding the proposed fiscal 2017 City Budget.

We are delighted that the proposed budget:

- Provides significant funding to increase the stock of affordable housing in the City;
- Allocates resources to support implementation of the Children and Youth Master Plan; and,
- Aims to address the capacity and resource needs of the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

We understand how important it is to address the overcrowding at nearly every elementary school in the city. While we applaud the request for \$11.5 million in capital and operating funds to begin addressing this issue starting with the PreK students, this request raises questions that deserve additional discussion.

The PreK students served by ACPS are students in either Head Start or the Virginia Preschool Initiative and are by definition from families with low- incomes and often have other potential educational challenges. We appreciate that ACPS has an urgent need for additional classroom space, however addressing this need by isolating 360 or more 4-year olds in a separate, single building is problematic. We are concerned that this model:

- Congregates a large number of very young students in one place with no evidence it is developmentally appropriate for them;

- Isolates those students away from their neighborhoods; and,
- Requires their parents, who are by definition low-income, to travel across the city to access child care.

The majority of PreK students in Alexandria do not attend the public schools, however there was no conversation with the child care community at-large prior to this capital request about how to best serve these particular children from an academic perspective or in terms of existing classroom capacity in the city.

We need to be sure that there is adequate funding for any solution. It is also unclear how the estimated costs were calculated and what they cover. For example, one of the ideas rumored to be planned is to support the needs of these children with wrap around services from off hours care to assistance for families. However there is as of yet no public documentation or budget for those services.

We believe that this is the wrong solution to the capacity problem. We encourage creative thinking about potential solutions and adequate funding for the selected solution. For example, has the school system considered:

- Instead of constructing or leasing a building for a new elementary school and PreK center, constructing or leasing two new schools for children to attend in their own neighborhood?
- Instead of creating one center for 300 + children, consider 3-5 smaller sites across the city?
- Partnering with Northern Virginia Community College to support more of our high school seniors to free up space?
- How this proposed solution aligns with the mixed delivery system pilot just approved by the Virginia General Assembly?

We need to not pit one group of students against another to solve our classroom capacity problems. We urge Council and the School Board to research, develop and fund a plan that appropriately addresses the educational needs of all students.

#