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Mayor Gaskins and the Mayoral Interfaith Council Announce the Fresh Start Initiative: A Partnership to Prevent Evictions and Promote Housing Stability

Alexandria, VA – In response to mounting housing affordability challenges across the City, Mayor Alyia Gaskins and the Mayor’s Interfaith Council are launching a transformative partnership aimed at preventing evictions and strengthening long-term financial stability for families living in public housing.

Recent conversations with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) revealed that over 445 of ARHA’s public housing households collectively owe approximately \$1 million in back rent. The economic impact of increases in the cost of living, the challenges facing the DMV’s regional job market, and the lingering effects of the economic fallout of the pandemic have made it more difficult for many ARHA residents to pay their federally-set rent amounts. While rent collection is required and essential to maintaining public housing operations, collecting this volume of arrears could strain already limited rental assistance systems and place hundreds of families at risk of eviction and homelessness.

Through a new initiative titled “**The Fresh Start Initiative**” Alexandria’s faith community will work alongside the City, ARHA, ACT for Alexandria, and the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) to establish a temporary, charitable fund to clear verified arrearages, connect residents to financial empowerment resources, and to ensure improved systems at ARHA.

“This is about more than clearing balances — it’s about creating pathways to stability,” said Mayor Alyia Gaskins. “Housing affordability continues to be one of the most pressing challenges facing our city. Through the Interfaith Council, we are harnessing the moral leadership and generosity of our faith community to prevent displacement while also investing in financial literacy and long-term economic security.”

Alfred Street Baptist Church has pledged to clear the outstanding balances in full, raising over \$1 million dollars to accomplish this goal.

“Housing stability is foundational to thriving families and thriving communities. At Alfred Street Baptist Church, we believe faith must be lived out in tangible ways and supporting The Fresh Start Initiative alongside the City and Mayor Gaskins is our way of putting love into action. With the support of other faith leaders across our community, we are helping families remain in their homes while also investing in the tools and resources that will empower them to build stronger financial futures. Our hope is that this moment becomes a new beginning — not just financially, but for the long-term stability and well-being of families throughout our city.” - *Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley*

With the balances cleared, several additional faith leaders have already committed to expanding resources their congregation would provide focused on financial empowerment and wealth building for participating families:



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- “Through The Fresh Start Initiative, we have an opportunity to administer hope and compassion to the community and live out the gospel in a tangible way. In addition, through our affiliate non-profit, Harambee Community and Economic Development Corporation, Shiloh provides affordable housing for senior citizens through Beasley Square. Shiloh is proud to continue our efforts to ensure affordable housing in Alexandria.” - *Dr. Taft Quincey Heatley, Senior Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church of Alexandria*
- “We believe stable housing is foundational to the health and dignity of every individual and family. At Groveton Baptist Church, we are committed to serving our community in tangible ways that restore hope and create pathways toward long-term stability. This initiative reflects both compassion and strategic impact, addressing immediate needs while investing in lasting transformation. It is a privilege to partner with city leadership and the Interfaith Council in advancing this vital work.” - *Pastor Nathan Irving, Executive Pastor of Groveton Baptist Church*
- “The Torah teaches, ‘Proclaim liberty throughout the land’—a reminder that the burdens of our past need not define the possibilities of our future. Every person deserves the dignity of a new beginning. Agudas Achim Congregation is honored to stand with and support members of our city as they seek a true fresh start.” - *Rabbi Steven I. Rein, Agudas Achim Congregation*

Additional institutions are exploring commitments and expected to join throughout the month of March.

The partnership will operate through formal agreements outlining roles, oversight, and measurable outcomes to verify arrearages, strengthen communication and system tracking, expand resident supports, and improve long-term operational transparency. ACT for Alexandria will manage an independent charitable fund for the Fresh Start Initiative and disburse funds to ARHA and financial empowerment partners. DCHS and other community partners will provide financial empowerment and economic mobility support to participating families.

“In response to urgent needs, the Alexandria community continues to lead with generosity, compassion, and commitment to nurturing a place where all residents can thrive. Together, we are building pathways to lasting economic well-being, because a truly thriving community is one where every resident has the financial security to reach their full potential. ACT is proud to collaborate with the City of Alexandria, ARHA, the Mayor’s Interfaith Council, and financial empowerment partners on this exemplary private-public partnership.” - *Heather Peeler, President and CEO of ACT for Alexandria*

“ARHA is committed to ensuring that every resident ledger is accurate, transparent, and verified in partnership with families. ARHA staff have taken responsibility to strengthen ARHA’s internal systems, improve communication, and expand supports so residents have both clarity and the tools they need to remain stably housed without the fear of eviction. This partnership allows us to build a responsible and sustainable model that supports both residents and the long-term health of public housing in Alexandria.” - *Mark Jinks, Chair of the ARHA Board of Commissioners*

Through this collaborative effort, the Mayor’s Interfaith Council seeks to prevent displacement while strengthening long-term housing stability for families across Alexandria.