



**County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of December 13, 2008**

DATE: December 11, 2008

SUBJECT: Allocation of Funds from Economic Transition Fund for Safety Net Programs

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

1. Reallocate \$565,391 from the non-departmental Economic Transition Fund (101.91102) to be used for increased funding for a safety net plan for critical emergency assistance programs and appropriate these funds to the Department of Human Services (101.51108).

ISSUES: The impact of the economic downturn is affecting the most vulnerable populations in Arlington. Rising food costs, scarcity of affordable housing and job losses are causing increased numbers of people to seek emergency assistance from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and its non-profit partner organizations.

SUMMARY: In order to ensure that Arlington is able to meet the growing needs of its population, additional funding is needed for the programs most responsive to the emergency needs of residents at risk: Housing Grants, Emergency Lodging, Eviction Prevention Fund administered through Arlingtonians Meeting Emergency Needs (AMEN), General Relief and the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC).

BACKGROUND The increase need for basic safety net services is evident by the increased numbers of people seeking assistance through DHS and its non-profit partner agencies:

- Housing Grants applications increased 38 percent in the past two months; the number of households receiving grants has increased from 722 in November 2007 to 832 in November 2008;
- New clients seeking assistance through the Crisis Assistance Bureau (CAB) has increased by 25 percent since July, with 1,301 new clients seen between July and November 2008;
- Money for eviction prevention through AMEN is now exhausted by the 15th of the month;
- The average number of client visits per month to the Employment Center's job resource services increased from 752 per month in 2007 to 1,275 in October 2008.
- The number of clients turned away from the Residential Program Center (RPC) homeless shelter has increased by 78 percent between July and October, representing 63 clients turned away;

County Manager: _____

Staff: Anita Friedman, DHS/EID

- The centralized family shelter admission system managed by DHS now has 19 families on its waiting list;
- Household visits to AFAC for food assistance grew 37 percent in October and November as compared with these two months in 2007.

DISCUSSION: The five programs needing additional funding support the Arlington safety net in critical ways:

Housing Grants: The Housing Grants Program provides low-income working families, disabled and elderly households with a monthly rental subsidy of approximately \$460. Last year the County Board increased the Housing Grants budget by \$528,992, from \$3.9 million to \$4.3 million, to meet the increased demand for services. The demand continues to increase. Even with no additional funding, the program is facing a \$266,000 deficit. Additional funding of \$300,000 is necessary to cover the costs of the deficit and to meet the increased demand anticipated for the remainder of the year.

Emergency Lodging: There is increased demand and insufficient shelter capacity for both homeless families and individuals. Through the family shelter centralized intake process, all homeless families are referred to CAB and then placed in shelters. The current family shelter waiting list has 19 families. The RPC shelter has turned away 63 people from July to October due to lack of space. An emergency lodging fund will allow DHS to provide temporary motel shelter to individuals and families when no other alternative exists. \$20,000 will serve 20 households with families receiving priority at an average cost of \$100 for ten nights each when the shelters are full and no other alternative exists.

Arlingtonians Meeting Emergency Needs: AMEN's Carter Jenkinson Fund is the primary resource for homeless prevention. The fund provides assistance for past due rent, security deposits and other housing-related expenses. It is a crucial part of the initiative to prevent eviction and homelessness. AMEN faces such high demand that the monthly allotment is expended by the 15th of each month. The addition of \$78,000 will expand assistance for the full month of requests (serving 28 persons instead of 14) and allow clients to receive up to two months, instead of only one month, of aid to ensure housing stability.

General Relief Assistance: General Relief is a state program co-funded by the Virginia Department of Social Services (62.5 percent) and the County (37.5 percent). The program has a menu of six possible components: general relief emergency funds, financial assistance (\$220 per month) to short-term disabled clients and those awaiting Supplemental Security Income (SSI), medical benefits, financial assistance to children living with non-relatives and burial assistance. State budget cuts reduced the County's FY09 General Relief allocation from \$567,000 to \$396,207. Due to these reductions, Arlington is faced with eliminating all components except general relief emergency and burial assistance. The emergency component is used for shelter, utilities, medical expenses and clothing for needy clients; it will be exhausted well before the year's end. The elimination of the SSI component would impact benefits for 51 clients with serious mental illness, disabilities, substance abuse or person who are homeless and awaiting a

disability determination from the U.S. Social Security Administration. Many of these are in the supportive housing program and the General Relief monthly benefit is their sole source of income. The addition of \$102,391 to the General Relief program will restore assistance to these severely ill clients waiting for SSI, as well as allow continuance of the emergency component for the full fiscal year.

Arlington Food Assistance Center: Rising food costs have led to a significant increase in demand for food from AFAC. This program served 37 percent more families in the past two months than in the same period last year. The total AFAC budget in FY09 was more than one million dollars. The County's contribution of \$184,530 represents about 18 percent of the total. The increase of \$65,000 will help support AFAC's increased household visits per week.

Safety Net Plan

	Focus	Funding	Approved FY09 Budget	Request for Additional FY09 Funds
Housing Grants	Rental Subsidy	Local	\$4,307,507	\$300,000
Emergency Lodging	Temporary Housing	Local	\$ 1,000	\$ 20,000
AMEN	Eviction Prevention	Local/Nonprofit	\$ 215,365	\$ 78,000
AFAC	Supplemental Food	Local/Nonprofit	\$ 184,530	\$ 65,000
General Relief	Subsidy/medical for seriously ill waiting for Social Security and clients seeking emergency assistance	State/local	\$ 311,598	\$102,391
Total			\$5,020,000	\$ 565,391

FISCAL IMPACT: Adoption of the Safety Net Plan will be funded out of the Economic Transition Fund, which was created by the Board at the November 15, 2008 meeting. The Economic Transition Fund had a starting balance of \$9,301,727. After the appropriation of \$565,391 to DHS, \$8,736,336 will remain in the Economic Transition Fund.