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## **Cross-sector Task Force Collaborates to Prevent Evictions in Northern Virginia**

Recognizing that the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic could result in a wave of evictions and a spike in homelessness with community-wide impact, including a disproportionate impact on communities of color, a diverse coalition of stakeholders from the housing sector has come together in Northern Virginia to identify best practices to prevent evictions and stabilize households.

The Northern Virginia Eviction Prevention and Community Stability Task Force, co-convened by the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (NVAHA) and Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV), includes advocates, attorneys, landlords and property owners, human service providers, and representatives of local government agencies, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and Senator Tim Kaine's office. The Task Force is unique in its balanced, multi-pronged approach to eviction prevention, which seeks to address the needs of all stakeholders, and recognizes that the housing crisis facing our region and our nation will not be solved through an eviction moratorium alone.

The Task Force promotes tenants' rights education and access to rental assistance and other public relief programs through the Northern Virginia Eviction Prevention and Housing Stability Toolkit, housed on the NVAHA website. In addition to information for tenants, the Toolkit includes guidance for local governments on how to help small, market affordable property owners avoid foreclosure, and recommendations for state and federal policies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19-related housing instability.

Patrick Algyer, Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Apartment Association (NVAA) and a Task Force member commented, "NVAA feels privileged to participate in the Task Force representing Landlord interests and working with stakeholders from Northern Virginia as well as the state and federal level. The eviction moratorium does not solve a housing/rent crisis problem, it delays and exacerbates it by increasing rent delinquency to untenable levels. Rent assistance is the only way to solve the ongoing housing/rent crisis."

The regional coalition also includes representatives from the Cities of Alexandria and Falls Church, and Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William Counties, providing local government staff the opportunity to learn from the successes and challenges experienced by neighboring localities. As participants in this regional effort, landlords and non-profit organizations operating in multiple jurisdictions can stay abreast of available assistance in each community where they work, and human service providers can offer timely referrals to residents moving out of their service area following an eviction.

The looming wave of evictions resulting from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the entire housing and human services sector, and all stakeholders have a role to play in preventing evictions and promoting community stability. The Northern Virginia Eviction Prevention and Community Stability Task Force is a collaborative, regional initiative to bring cross-sector solutions to this economic and public health crisis. As Dipti Pidikiti-Smith, Deputy Director of Advocacy for LSNV commented:

“It can take generations to recover from the negative impacts of an eviction avalanche especially among our communities of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Prior to the health crisis, families were struggling to stay afloat and the pandemic exacerbated long-standing inequities. Financial assistance, food assistance, and health assistance are needed. A holistic regional approach to address the impacts of COVID-19 will benefit individuals and families in our community.”

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