

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2025 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers**

March 22, 2024

Question:

Can we get a budget memo on the concerns raised by the Alexandria Community Services Board January 10, 2024 health professionals compensation letter to City Council?

Response:

The Virginia General Assembly allocated funding to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) earmarked for Community Services Boards across the Commonwealth for the purpose of increasing staff salaries. The Alexandria Community Services Board (ACSB) within the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) was allocated approximately \$1.3 million dollars for ACSB staff salaries. The allocation from the General Assembly was intended to raise salaries by a total of 5.0%.

The City Manager's FY25 Proposed Budget provides a 2.0% pay scale adjustment and a merit step increase which ranges between a 2.3% and 5.0% increase depending on the employee's current step on the pay scale. The funding received from DBHDS will be used to fund these proposed pay increases along with City general fund dollars. The funding received from DBHDS combined with the City Manager's proposed pay scale adjustment and merit step increase will be used to help fund the proposed salary raise for ACSB staff.

In addition, the City has approved increases in two critical areas in the behavioral health system during the current fiscal year. Authorization was given to provide a 5% increase for two long-term DCHS/CSB psychiatrists employees. The City has also increased the pay for Emergency Services staff during this current fiscal year based upon a compensation study of these positions which was completed by the Department of Human Resources in February 2022.

The competition in the region for a limited number of applicants for both licensed and non-licensed staff continues to be a significant challenge. It is hoped that these pay increases along with a focus on other elements of compensation will address the critical vacancies currently being experienced.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Community Services Board January 2024 Letter



ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD



Promoting Respect, Recovery, Hope

The Honorable Justin Wilson
Mayor of Alexandria
Vice Mayor Amy Jackson
Councilman Canek Aguirre
Councilmember Sarah Bagley
Councilman John Chapman
Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins
Councilman R. Kirk McPike
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

January 10, 2024

Mayor Wilson and Council Members:

On behalf of the Alexandria Community Services Board, I am writing to request that the City reaffirm its commitment to ensuring that all City residents have access to needed health services by including provisions in the budget that will assist in the recruitment and retention of qualified health professionals. Without such provisions, we fear that there will be substantial and growing unmet needs for these critical services.

The problem is not that the City has not authorized comprehensive and progressive services for residents with behavioral health, substance abuse, and developmental disability issues; indeed, it has done so to a commendable extent. Instead, the problem is that the professional clinicians needed to provide these services are declining to come to work for us and several existing employees have chosen to leave. As of January 3, 2024, there were 64 vacancies out of the over 350 CSB positions currently authorized. During the calendar year 2023, we have lost 102 employees.

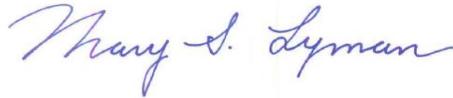
The issue, simply put, is compensation. As was the case with police and firefighters, the current compensation that we can offer health professionals is significantly below the amount offered by surrounding jurisdictions. Moreover, Virginia, like the rest of the country, is experiencing a severe shortage of health clinicians, making the hiring market for these professionals extremely competitive.

In recognition of this issue, the General Assembly in September 2023 allocated \$18 million dollars to all 40 CSBs specifically for pay adjustments and the General Assembly has allocated \$36 million dollars of ongoing funding beginning July 1, 2024, to all 40 CSBs in the State to help with compensation issues. The Alexandria CSB will receive a little over \$1.2 million dollars for salaries from the \$36 million allocated by the General Assembly. We are hopeful that these monies will help make the City's salary structure for these positions more competitive. Again, the current salary levels in the City's pay scale make it extremely difficult to compete for

the small applicant pool with our competitor jurisdictions. We therefore request that the City budget include provisions to help us hire and retain qualified personnel in this market by directly authorizing higher salaries for these professionals.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this matter. For additional information, please reach out to our CSB Executive Director, Phil Caldwell.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary S. Lyman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink stamp or highlight behind it.

Mary S. Lyman
Chair, Alexandria Community Services Board