



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

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**Supervisor Herrity  
November 21, 2017  
There's A Better Way**

**Background:** In our 2017 Point-In-Time Survey of our homeless population, 76% of the single adult homeless were unemployed. That's 376 people. And, for the adults in homeless families, it's slightly less at 43%, another 80 people who are unemployed.

We've also seen an increase in the number of panhandlers on our streets — in West Springfield, Fair Lakes, Tysons, Reston and throughout many neighborhoods in the County. On June 20, in response to a citizen's concern about panhandling, we directed staff to prepare a message similar to what the Arlington County Police have done - which is to urge motorists to stop giving to panhandlers. While we recognize that panhandling is not necessarily synonymous with homelessness, we must also recognize that there is a small percentage of our homeless population who may resort to begging for their next meal or month's rent.

In Albuquerque, NM, a program called "There's a Better Way" has become a national model for a *jobs-first approach* by offering the homeless dignity through work and connecting them to needed services. It also provided an option to panhandling and was successful at getting people the services they needed. I've included an attachment to this Board Matter to provide you with more information on this program.

I was reminded of this program when, at our last Revitalization Committee meeting, staff noted that they are seeking laborers to help maintain and improve our streetscapes in our commercial revitalization districts. In addition, there is more work for the Sheriff's Community Labor Workforce than we currently have inmates to perform it. There are also opportunities in Parks, other county agencies, and even the private sector for unskilled or low skilled labor.

I see the potential for this program to address a number of County issues:

- A way to proactively address the panhandling issue as it did in Albuquerque
- A way to provide panhandlers and homeless with the dignity of work, a work history and job references
- A way to connect these individuals with services by proactively engaging them as was the case in Albuquerque
- A way to utilize our funding of revitalization districts, community projects, parks, etc. to help our most vulnerable residents improve their lives through work.

I recently met with county staff and several non-profits and they believe the model is worth investigating in Fairfax County. I also recently learned from our Acting County Executive of a similar but more comprehensive program in Boulder, Colorado – Ready to Work – that also focuses on the dignity of work as well as the consolidation of needed services – which is currently not the case for our homeless in Fairfax County. It is clear that any solution would

require the participation of the non-profit community and the business community. A pilot program or phased approach could also be used to test the concept.

**Motion:** Therefore Madam Chairman, I ask the Board to direct the County Executive to have the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness work with our nonprofits, business community and those County agencies that employ unskilled labor to identify if and how a program like “There’s a Better Way” or “Ready to Work” could be implemented in Fairfax County and report back to the Board at an upcoming Health and Human Services Committee meeting.