

Letter to the Editor: Hospital Expansion Would Better Serve Arlington's Homeless Population



A rendering of the planned Virginia Hospital Center expansion (courtesy photo)

The following Letter to the Editor was submitted by Michael Garcia, a Columbia Pike insurance agent who serves as the board chair of the Arlington Street People's Assistance Network, a local nonprofit that works with homeless individuals in Arlington. A-SPAN is weighing in on the proposed Virginia Hospital Center expansion, which the Arlington Planning Commission and some residents who live near the hospital oppose in its current form.

I am writing in support of the Virginia Hospital Center expansion project. It is my hope that the County Board recognizes the enormous value that VHC brings to this community and approves the project, as soon as possible.

As Board Chair of the Arlington Street People's Assistance Network (A-SPAN) and a long-time Arlington resident, I see first-hand the consequences of delayed healthcare visits. The homeless clients at the Homeless Services Center frequently suffer from infections, life threatening reactions to untreated chronic illnesses and other medical conditions. That is why we have the Medical Respite and Nursing Services Program at the Homeless Services Center.

For most Arlington County citizens, when a doctor says to go home and recuperate, that's what they do, but what do you do when you have no home?

VHC and A-SPAN through our partnership work together to ensure that these homeless individuals and veterans have a safe, compassionate, high-quality environment in which to recuperate.

VHC staff make every effort to assess and treat patients in a holistic way. When homeless patients are discharged from the Hospital to the Medical Respite Program, A-SPAN is part of the follow-up care plan and clients are referred to VHC outpatient services, as appropriate.

I cannot stress enough the value of a new Behavioral Health Center like the one proposed by VHC. Over 70% of homeless veterans and individuals suffer from some form of mental illness and this condition must be treated.

We are fortunate that VHC, an Arlington provider that was recently named one of America's 100 top Hospitals for the third year in a row, is willing to respond to the community's need for more outpatient mental health services. Moreover, the VHC has indicated that all patients would be welcome at the new Center, regardless of their ability to pay.

The distinction of VHC being named as one of the 100 Top Hospitals in the nation is an honor benefitting all Arlingtonians by providing excellent care to the community. I am confident that this commitment to excellence will extend to the newly proposed Behavioral Health Center services, as well. VHC is a community partner worthy of support and we hope our elected leaders demonstrate this support.

Sincerely,

Michael Garcia
Board Chair, A-SPAN