



EQUALITY ARLINGTON
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March 21, 2024

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Arlington, VA 22201

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Mr. Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Arlington County
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

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Corey Barton

Arlington County's Services for the LGBTQ+ Community

Tiffanie Havenar

Dear Ms. Garvey and Mr. Schwartz,

Arne Nelson

Equality Arlington, a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of the LGBTQ+ community in Arlington, Virginia, has been engaging with LGBTQ+ Arlingtonians since 2022 to identify the ways in which Arlington County is adequately serving the queer community and ways in which it can improve. While Arlington County is generally a friendly and accepting community, Equality Arlington has observed the following overarching gaps in the county's services for LGBTQ+ residents:

- Lack of marketing/advertising for programs that serve the LGBTQ+ community. Many LGBTQ+ residents reported that they seek health, cultural, and community-building programs/services in the District of Columbia because Arlington does not offer or advertise programs/services specific to the LGBTQ+ community.
- Lack of tailored programming or services for the LGBTQ+ community—simply making programs or services open to everyone does not ensure that the specific health, safety, and care needs of special populations are adequately served.
- Lack of ongoing engagement with the LGBTQ+ community through limited outreach efforts at many departments and offices.
- Lack of designated LGBTQ+ “champions” within each county department/office to ensure that the specific needs of LGBTQ+ residents are understood and incorporated into programming or services.

Gaps in service to the LGBTQ+ community identified in the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Municipal Equality Index (MEI) published in 2023 present a useful starting point for the county to address these unmet needs. While Arlington has been

awarded a score of 100 since 2020, the MEI offers localities the opportunity to score up to 122 total points and [Arlington's 2023 score](#) was only 108 points¹, which is 88% of the total available points. This underscores the message that Arlington County has made great progress in being a friendly community for LGBTQ+ residents but it still has more work to do. We have also identified some questionable points that have been awarded to Arlington County but do not seem to be backed up by evidence from county staff.

The table below identifies indicators from the MEI where Arlington County received zero points or where Equality Arlington believes the county needs to improve services and our recommendations for the county.

<p>LGBTQ+ Liaison to City Executive's Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points Awarded: 5 out of 5 	<p>The Assistant County Manager for the Office of Human Rights, EEO & ADA currently holds the title of LGBTQ+ Liaison to the County Manager. However, we were told by the Office of Human Rights that the liaison title only refers to her role coordinating the county's response to HRC's MEI survey. Equality Arlington believes that the county does have a need for a true liaison to the LGBTQ+ community and we recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The County Manager should either expand the scope of the current liaison role or redesignate the role to another official who has the capacity to assume the full responsibilities. Examples of liaison functions in surrounding jurisdictions include the DC Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Affairs and the Alexandria LGBTQ+ Task Force. We believe that the liaison function should have responsibility for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring the needs of the LGBTQ+ community through engagement with stakeholder groups and the community Keeping the County Manager and senior county officials apprised of the needs of LGBTQ+ residents Coordinating with departments and offices throughout the county to ensure that staff are considering the needs of the LGBTQ+ community and incorporating those needs into county policies and programs Serving as a point of contact for LGBTQ+ residents who need county assistance Coordinating resources within the county for LGBTQ+ culturally competent training
<p>Youth Bullying Prevention Policy for City Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points Awarded: 0 out of 2 	<p>The Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation has incorporated anti-bullying provisions related to sexual orientation and gender into its Summer Code of Conduct. Department staff have also made it clear that its programs are open to residents of all sexual orientations and gender identities. While we appreciate the steps that the department has taken to be welcoming and supportive, we remain concerned about potential bullying in county programs targeting LGBTQ+ youth. We have had conversations with LGBTQ+ youth,</p>

¹ The Human Rights Campaign Foundation does not score localities higher than 100 points despite the index offering up to 122 points.

	<p>especially transgender and non-binary youth, who reported systemic instances of peer-to-peer bullying that have negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing. Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington County make clear that the Summer Code of Conduct and its anti-bullying provisions apply to year-round programming and not just summer programs. • Arlington County meet with LGBTQ+ youth, especially trans and non-binary youth, to discuss steps that staff can take to prevent bullying and ensure county programs are safe and supportive environments.
<p>City Provides Services to LGBTQ+ Youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Points Awarded: 2 out of 2 	<p>We did not find any evidence of Arlington County providing specific services to LGBTQ+ youth. County staff stated that county programs are open to all but that there are no programs aimed at the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth. In discussions with county staff, we also learned that the county does not provide culturally competent training for staff working with LGBTQ+ youth through Department of Parks and Recreation programs. Staff expressed strong interest in receiving training to ensure that they make LGBTQ+ youth feel comfortable and supported. Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington County provide LGBTQ+ culturally competent training to front-line Parks and Recreation staff working with youth. • Arlington County explore offering their own LGBTQ+ youth programs or partnering with organizations that offer LGBTQ+ youth programs in the DC metro area.
<p>City Provides Services to LGBTQ+ People Experiencing Homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Points Awarded: 0 out of 2 	<p>Equality Arlington has been working with the Department of Human Services (DHS) since 2023 to better incorporate the needs of LGBTQ+ residents into the county’s homelessness services and Continuum of Care programs. We commend DHS staff for their willingness to engage with us and better serve LGBTQ+ residents. To better serve LGBTQ+ residents experiencing homelessness, Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington County and its nonprofit Continuum of Care partners should begin collecting optional sexual orientation and gender identity information on intake forms and Point in Time Count surveys to better establish the number of LGBTQ+ residents currently using Arlington’s shelter and transitional housing services to better understand the needs of this population. • Provide LGBTQ+ culturally competent training to all front-line county staff and continuum of care partners including first responders and emergency personnel. • Ask clients using homelessness services if they would like to share their preferred pronouns and post them so that everyone is aware within the facility. • Do not require clients using homelessness services to provide deadnames. • Conduct a needs assessment for LGBTQ+ homelessness services.

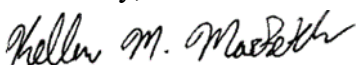
<p>City Provides Services to LGBTQ+ Older Adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points Awarded: 0 out of 2 	<p>We did not find any evidence of Arlington County providing services for LGBTQ+ Older Adults. According to SAGE and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s Long-Term Care Equality Index 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 76% of LGBTQ+ older people are concerned about having adequate social supports to rely on as they age. 73% of LGBTQ+ older people do not have access to LGBTQ+ specific services for older people. 70% of LGBTQ+ older people are concerned that they will have to hide their identity in a long-term care community. <p>There were no long-term care and senior housing communities within Arlington County listed in the Long-Term Care Equality Index 2023. While Arlington County is not unique in its lack of support services for aging LGBTQ+ adults, our community should do more to ensure LGBTQ+ seniors have safe and supportive aging experiences in Arlington County. Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arlington County support the proposed Clarendon Presbyterian Church and APAH proposal to develop 92 affordable senior housing units friendly for LGBTQ+ seniors to meet a critical gap in Arlington County’s housing supply for seniors and LGBTQ+ adults. Arlington County partner with SAGE or other LGBTQ+ organizations to encourage long-term care and senior housing communities within the county to adopt or enhance non-discrimination and staff training, resident services and support for LGBTQ+ residents, supportive LGBTQ+ employee benefits and policies, and improved resident and community engagement.
<p>City Provides Services to People Living with HIV or AIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points Awarded: 0 out of 2 	<p>Arlington County runs the HIV/STI Services Program and Virginia Medication Assistance Program (MAP) (formerly the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP)). While we appreciate the commitment of the Public Health Division to preventing and treating STIs, we believe more needs to be done to serve the LGBTQ+ community. According to county staff, the rates of HIV infection rose 58% from 2022 to 2023 in Arlington and much of this increase is among young adults. The MAP program mostly serves legacy patients dating back to the county’s partnership with the Whitman-Walker Clinic which used to operate in the county in the early 2000s. During our engagement efforts with LGBTQ+ residents, not a single person knew that the county offered these programs and many said that free STI testing and HIV treatment were priority needs for the LGBTQ+ community in Arlington. Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arlington County subsidize the cost of STI testing for county residents so that it is free. The Virginia Department of Health instituted a sliding scale payment system in 2017 replacing the prior system of free testing. County staff reported a decrease in residents participating in their testing program since that time. Arlington County should dedicate resources to marketing aimed

	<p>at LGBTQ+ residents. The effectiveness of the county’s public health efforts are dependent on resident participation. We believe that there are currently low levels of awareness among LGBTQ+ residents of public health services offered by the county which contributes to poorer health outcomes for LGBTQ+ residents.</p>
<p>City Provides Services to the Transgender Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Points Awarded: 0 out of 2 	<p>We did not find any evidence of Arlington County providing services for the Transgender Community. Transgender residents face disproportionate levels of discrimination, stigma, and systemic inequality. We have spoken with transgender residents or parents of transgender youth who have described challenges finding gender-affirming healthcare, bullying, and a lack of supportive community spaces. At a time when the transgender community and their rights are under increasing attack across the country, Arlington County should be proactively identifying ways to ensure transgender Arlingtonians feel safe and supported in our community. Equality Arlington recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington County review all county forms in use across the government that request gender information to ensure that a “non-binary” or “other” option is available on those forms. • Arlington County conduct outreach and engage with transgender and non-binary residents, who are often marginalized and face discrimination, to identify opportunities to better support them. • Arlington County develop a resource guide for transgender residents seeking gender affirming care and/or legally changing their name/gender.

Arlington County remains one of the leading Virginia localities providing support for LGBTQ+ residents. Arlington Public Libraries has been running an adult and young adult LGBTQ+ book club for several years and has shown how a proactive approach to serving LGBTQ+ residents can have a positive impact on the community as a whole. However, our community is not without its reminders of hatred against LGBTQ+ residents including the repeated theft of pride flags from churches and private homes, hate-speech and slurs shouted at LGBTQ+ residents in public spaces within the county, and bullying of transgender and non-binary youth in our schools and community. Addressing the lack of tailored services for LGBTQ+ residents would help signal that the county is not only friendly to queer residents but actively seeks to improve their lives.

We look forward to the County Board and County Manager considering and acting on our recommendations and will continue to work with county staff to identify opportunities to make Arlington a more supportive community for LGBTQ+ residents.

Sincerely,



Kellen MacBeth
 President, Equality Arlington