



City of Alexandria, Virginia
301 King Street, Suite 2300
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Alyia Gaskins
Councilwoman

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Bethany Chang
Principal, On-Site Property Management
CIM

Jerry Thomas
Managing Dir., On-Site Property Management
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Dear Ms. Chang and Mr. Thomas,

As a member of the Alexandria City Council and as someone who works professionally to end homelessness, I am fully committed to ensuring that all people have safe, quality housing. Since taking office, I have heard and continue to hear that the residents of Southern Towers are facing significant challenges that impact the health, safety, and stability of their housing.

Residents have contacted me to share stories of their experiences, including:

- Subpar resolutions to maintenance requests. Residents have reported a lack of documentation for requests reported to the front desk staff, slow responses to requests submitted to the portal, and examples of mold being painted over instead of being properly remediated.
- Inconsistent cooling systems. In the month of July, amid record high temperatures, the City Council and the City's Code Enforcement Division received complaints that several residents went days without air conditioning. Similar complaints were received the week of August 21, 2023.
- The unintended consequences of Ratio Utility Billing Systems (RUBS). Although RUBS are a recognized practice, they can threaten the ability of Alexandrians to remain stably housed as illustrated by a tenant of Southern Towers who shared that previously they were only required to pay a flat rate of \$20 per person for water and \$15 for trash but recently received a bill of nearly \$500, which was not only drastically higher than expected but nearly impossible for them to afford. Furthermore, I was informed that even though the Virginia Code requires landlords to allow tenants to view copies of their bills to determine how they are being charged, many tenants only receive calculations of their bill with no usage or explanations of details. Tenants who have appeared at public hearings have shared that when they asked to see more details, property managers direct them to the contractors and the contractors direct them to the property managers, making it impossible to access information they have a right to access.



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Last week, I, along with several of my colleagues, participated in a site visit to hear directly from tenants and to see their experiences firsthand. I attend with my two small children. Upon entering one of the units with mold, my youngest began coughing so much that we had to exit the apartment. We also observed holes in walls and a major flood in the elevator. As a councilmember and mother, I do not want anyone living in conditions that compromise their health, safety, and stability. What we observed is unacceptable.

I know that our City's Code Enforcement Department, Office of Housing, and Health Department have engaged with your staff. And, while I have observed some of the improvements that have been made under your ownership, including a new playground and community space and the development of an online resident portal, there is still much to do to address the concerns residents have raised to the Council. All residents on your property, and throughout Alexandria, deserve safe and habitable housing.

It is critical that the issues above are addressed in an efficient and timely manner. I urge you to do what is right for your tenants and to work in good faith to engage residents in transparent, meaningful, and culturally appropriate ways.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Best,


Alyia Gaskins

Councilwoman