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**Fair game: Bryan Hill**  
by Chrissie McClatchie

If new starters at Fairfax County, Virginia, want to quickly get on the radar of their County Executive **Bryan Hill**, the best way is to challenge him to a game of basketball. "I would relish that opportunity," he tells *The CEO Magazine*. "I try to get on the court with anyone who wishes to do that."

Born in London to parents who had emigrated to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean island of Dominica, **Hill** came to the United States at a young age. The move saw him swap the soccer pitch for the basketball court – a switch that proved so successful he earned a spot on the college basketball team at Alfred University in upper New York state while studying public administration.

The game is still in his blood and playing it – not only with his team at the county government center, but the wider community as well – is more than simply a chance to shoot some hoops. "You have to be part of the community," **Hill** says. "If you're not, you can't understand the community. And if you can't understand it, how do you put policies in place to deliver the services that are needed?"

**Hill** was appointed the 10th Fairfax County Executive at the start of 2018, after three years serving as County Administrator at James City County in southeastern Virginia. A highlight was steering the county toward a AAA bond rating – making it the smallest county in the United States with such status. He admits he wasn't expecting to leave James City so soon. "When Fairfax County comes calling, you have to listen," he says.

Located in Northern Virginia, just a half-hour drive from the center of Washington DC, Fairfax has 1.2 million residents and is one of the country's most diverse counties in terms of population. The residents are also among the highest income earners in the state (and country, for that matter), with a median income of US \$150,000. "We're approximately 14 percent of the population of Virginia, but account for 25 percent of the net wealth," he says.

Another county with AAA status, **Hill** describes Fairfax as the 'economic engine' of the Commonwealth of Virginia, with nearly three-quarters of northern Virginia's 16 Fortune 500 companies, including Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics and Freddie Mac, calling Fairfax home. He is currently the fourth-longest serving county executive, managing a US \$5.4 billion budget and more than 16,000 full and part-time employees. "When I came from James City, nobody thought I'd be here for a week," **Hill** says. "But people have to remember that I was born in London, lived in New York City and played basketball."

A trio of experiences that taught him that, if he listened to all the noise, he'd be in trouble. "The noise doesn't bother me. It's about getting things done," he says. 'Getting things done' has been a hallmark of **Hill's** tenure so far. First up were some internal cultural issues that needed

resolution, particularly in the police and fire-and-rescue department. "Within three years of my arrival, I had to reinvent and rescope how both departments interacted, and that required a lot of work, because there's a lot of people within those two organizations," he says.

Personnel management was successfully navigated, and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. "Of several things I'm very proud of during the pandemic was the QR-code process that tracked details of everyone's vaccinations. It was something we could all use for travel," he explains. "It was very creative in my view. Cutting-edge."

The county's remarkable creativity is something **Hill** fully embraces in his role, helping it become a national leader in developing a toolkit that other counties have used to take their first steps with AI. He's also rolling out equity policies that ensure everyone has equal access to the economic wealth of the county. "We're large, but we are creative," he says. "That's what Fairfax brings to the table for so many people. We try to be nimble as we move along because change is never good when you're being told to change. "So my goal is to change before they tell us to change – because when we do that, we're in charge of the change."

Today, Fairfax County is considered one of the top-run governments in the United States, according to the National Association of Counties. "We've bounced between number one and two," he says. Such an accolade, **Hill** says, is down to his deputies and senior management team. It's also down to the example **Hill** sets as a leader. "I make sure to address every one of our new employees," he explains, estimating the figure is at least 2,500 people since he started in 2019. "I welcome them personally and ask them to understand one thing: family is always first. "I have a soon-to-be 89-year-old mother. If she's not well, I'm going home. And I encourage them to make sure their families are well first. We have leave policies that allow our people to go and take care of their family. You can replace a job, but you can't replace your family."

**Hill** also knows he couldn't have achieved all he's accomplished in eight years without external relationships, whether with private sector partners like technology talent development company Revature, which is headquartered in Fairfax County, or neighboring counties, including the District of Columbia.

This proximity to the nation's capital is among the factors that makes Fairfax County so attractive – from a business, resident and tourism perspective. "We have 422 parks and we rank in the top 10 for education, with 28 high schools, 23 middle schools and 142 elementary schools, and Fairfax County puts in more than 75 percent of the funding to support operational and capital expenditures with our public school system," **Hill** explains. "We have it all here in Fairfax County. That's why we appeal to a lot of people."