



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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COMMISSIONER

DEPARTMENT OF  
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To: The Honorable Janet D. Howell, Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Barry D. Knight, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Secretary of Finance Stephen E. Cummings

From: Nelson Smith, Commissioner of the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

RE: Item 326 E of the 2021 Appropriations Act regarding COVID-19 surveillance and testing at state facilities

## **Background**

Item 326 E of the 2021 Appropriations Act provides for \$2,142,601 in FY 2022 and \$4,282,202 in FY 2023 for surveillance and testing costs for the patients and staff to manage COVID-19 outbreaks at state facilities. The language states:

*Out of this appropriation, \$2,142,601 the first year and \$4,282,202 the second year from non-general funds is provided for the surveillance and testing costs of residents and staff in order to avoid and manage COVID-19 outbreaks at state facilities. The department shall coordinate with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and local health districts as appropriate to coordinate its testing and surveillance activities in order to access federal ELC Enhancing Detection Expansion grant funding provided to VDH through the Centers for Disease Control. The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services shall report quarterly to the Secretary of Finance and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees on the expense of these funds, including the number of tests administered.*

COVID-19 testing has been conducted at all Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) facilities based on plans coordinated with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) since the onset of the pandemic in 2021. The testing protocols have varied depending on the rate of infections within each facility and the input of the local health departments serving the area where the facility is located. In facilities that have experienced

outbreaks, this testing has occurred as frequently as twice per week for all individuals receiving services as well as all staff who might come into contact with a potentially COVID-positive individual.

During the past year, there have been periods of time during COVID-19 outbreaks at individual facilities that led the local health departments to recommend halting admissions to DBHDS facilities. Outbreaks lasted from fourteen to twenty eight days, depending on the type of individuals that the particular facility serves. Where these plans have been enacted, admissions have been restarted at facilities after the agreed-upon period of quarantine elapsed.

During these periods of quarantine, testing is conducted more frequently and has, at times, been required of all patients as well as direct care staff. There were periodic limits on or closures to state facility admissions in some of the state hospitals during the latter part of this last quarter due to needing to activate and maintain quarantine and isolation units. Currently, there are no state facilities that are closed to admissions due to COVID-19.

In accordance with The Governor's Executive Directive #18, all employees of the DBHDS in state facilities not fully vaccinated for COVID-19 were tested on a weekly basis during the second quarter of FY 2022. This, along with outbreaks of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, recently increased the number and amount of expenditures for testing. Currently, 18 percent of the employees at the state facilities have not received full vaccination status and were, therefore, required to obtain weekly testing.

The number of COVID-19 tests administered at DBHDS state facilities during the first quarter of FY 22 was 8,131 although, as explained below, these were not funded from 326E. During the past quarter, this increased to 14,823 tests administered. While there was still some availability of ARPA funds for testing materials during the past quarter, there was \$189,218.17 utilized from the 326.E Appropriations during the second quarter of FY 2022.

### **Current Status of 326.E Appropriations**

The federal ELC Enhancing Detection Expansion grant was awarded in August 2021 to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). To receive these federal funds from VDH, DBHDS needs to be a sub-recipient. DBHDS has worked with VDH to establish a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to create the required relationship and the structure to meet federal sub-recipient guidelines required by the grant. This MOA was signed in October. Distribution of funds will continue on a monthly basis to DBHDS, as the grant is disbursed through reimbursement. Because the appropriation for FY2021 was allocated retroactively, exact expenditures for this item are not available for FY2021.

cc: The Honorable John Little, Secretary of Health and Human Resources