Danny TK Avula MD, MPH
Commissioner

December 15, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable John Littel
Secretary of Health & Human Services

The Honorable Robert Mosier
Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

The Honorable Janet D. Howell
Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Barry D. Knight
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Michael Maul, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: Danny TK Avula MD, MPH

SUBJECT: Report on Emergency Shelter Readiness

This report is submitted in compliance with Item 349.A. of the 2022 Appropriation Act, which states:

A. By October 1 of each year, the Sheltering Coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland

Security, the Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

If you should have questions, please contact me at (804) 726-7011.

DA:kc

2022 Report to the General Assembly

Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 1, 2022

Executive Summary

> A. By October 1 of each year, the Sheltering Coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

This report, in accordance with Item 349(A), provides a status update on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness. Sheltering is a local government responsibility, but local sheltering capability varies greatly across the Commonwealth and there are limitations to our ability to measure each locality's capability. This hinders the ability to truly capture readiness for an emergency operation.

A majority of the localities indicated they need external staff support to adequately operate shelters. VDSS and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) have discussed host and regional sheltering options to bolster local sheltering, but these have not yet been implemented.

The State Coordinated Regional Shelter (SCRS) Program has improved since the last report, but still faces challenges in supporting localities in the eventuality of a catastrophic event. The SCRS Program is limited in capacity and in capabilities, even after concerted efforts to increase available shelter sites, acquire necessary commodities, and develop an emergency workforce.

The Virginia Department of Social Services Office of Emergency Management completes this report with a list of priority recommendations that are actionable in the upcoming year.

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Introduction: A Comprehensive Sheltering System

Sheltering begins at the local level and may expand to the regional and state level, depending on the level of need. Thus, local, regional, and state partners need to coordinate planning, response, and recovery efforts to effectively manage resources to meet the basic needs of all individuals who require shelter.

The shelter system relies on multiple strategies to provide the greatest support to the Commonwealth's population. The shelter system can be represented as a stool, where each leg symbolizes different sheltering resources. Each leg of this stool would represent a different jurisdictional method to sheltering: Local, Host, Regional, and State. Ideally, the shelter system is supported by each method. Each of the different legs would be stable because each sheltering method would be equally well planned to respond accordingly to any size and scale of disaster. The legs would be connected through coordinated plans and standard procedures. They would strengthen each other to guarantee that the burden of need could be supported. Unfortunately, there are challenges to the sheltering system in Virginia that prevent having a system where key partners support and reinforce each other as the model would demonstrate.
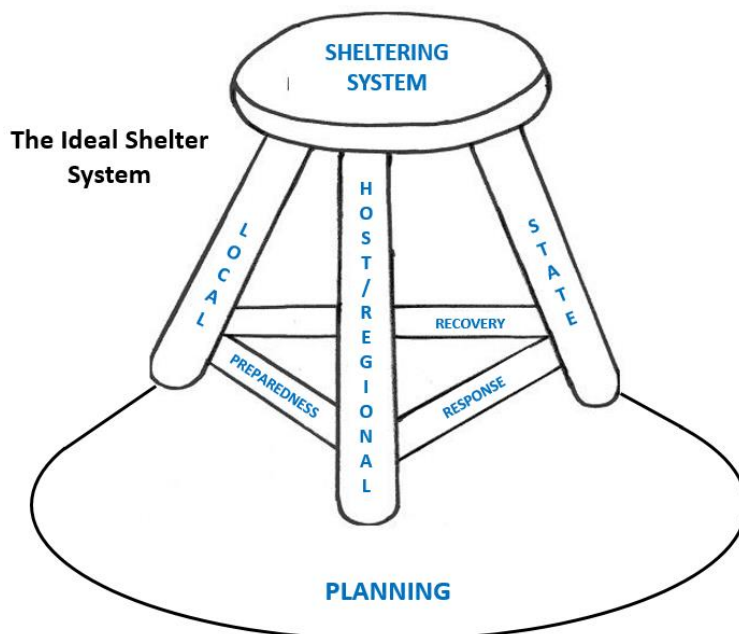
Local sheltering varies greatly from locality to locality due to a lack of standardization in emergency planning and the variance in resources available to each locality. Coastal communities and the Hampton Roads area have received the most attention by state level emergency planners due to their perceived higher risk for catastrophic damage from a hurricane or tropical storm.

Host and regional sheltering are limited in the Commonwealth as localities face barriers in seeking reimbursements across jurisdictional borders and in collaborating to find shared solutions. Host sheltering, which refers to localities sheltering evacuees outside of their jurisdiction, continues to be explored as a viable option for meeting sheltering needs throughout the Commonwealth through the use of Statewide Mutual Aid. Local emergency managers have not yet used this as a solution to fulfilling sheltering gaps. A few individual localities have Memorandums of Agreements (MOAs) in place to provide host sheltering for neighboring localities; however, pre-identified host shelters are not common throughout the Commonwealth. The concept of regional sheltering is currently being considered by the localities in the Hampton Roads area but planning efforts have stalled in the stage of defining scope and mission.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) has made efforts in strengthening the State Coordinated Regional Shelter (SCRS) Plan's capacities and capabilities but are still hampered by multiple challenges. In terms of capacity, VDSS maintains appropriate documentation of the established shelter sites and recently updated the site-specific commodities list for contractual acquisition in the event of shelter activation. VDSS was unable to acquire new shelter sites, so their capacities were not increased since the last report. VDSS has bolstered their staffing capabilities to be readily trained and deployable year-round, for two weeks at a time. In addition to these internal efforts, VDSS has also submitted an RFP for contracts providing the commodities and logistical staff to support the operation of state shelters. Even with these steps made towards increasing state-level capabilities, the Commonwealth faces a large deficit in meeting the needs of overwhelmed local shelters during a catastrophic disaster.

Local Sheltering

One of the evacuation areas of greatest concern for the Commonwealth is Hampton Roads, due to its coastal location and heightened risk of flooding from tropical weather and storm surge events. Key observations from a recent Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assessment[1] of the region include:

- "Localities have identified the need for a regional organization mechanism that can perform resource allocation and consolidation, operational coordination, and blue-sky preparedness/plan development."
- "Each locality is challenged with logistical planning for and operational execution of medical evacuation plans, sheltering requirements, and contract deconfliction within the jurisdiction. Each locality lacks a resource assessment of local jurisdiction resources and commodity requirements for large-scale incidents."
- "Many jurisdictions throughout Hampton Roads rely heavily on VOAD [Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster] support for sheltering needs. This leaves a significant gap in staffing available to support shelters during catastrophic, multi-jurisdictional events. The region also lacks adequate facilities to support large regional shelters; as many of the larger facilities are situated in flood/evacuation zones or are otherwise already identified by the Commonwealth for use as State Coordinated Regional Shelters [SCRS]."

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[1] Hampton Roads Urban Areas Security Initiative: Logistics Capability Assistance Tool (LCAT) 2 Assessment Results and Analysis Report. (August 3-5, 2021). Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Hampton Roads is somewhat unique in that it has a history of storm shelters and local evacuations due to the frequency of weather and flooding events, but local actors are concerned about their shelter capabilities and capacities in a more than an "average" storm event. This region is the only one in the Commonwealth with large evacuation zones. In the event of a large-scale evacuation, SCRS will not be able to absorb all the evacuees that local shelters are not prepared to handle.

Overall, in the Commonwealth, local shelter planning and preparedness is not as robust as necessary to meet local needs during a large sheltering event. Many jurisdictions have sparse or dated shelter plans and lack resources to effectively support the needs of their constituents. The annual Local Capabilities Assessment for Readiness (LCAR) Report is intended to measure the shelter capacity of each locality. There is a significant limitation to this report as localities do not measure sheltering capabilities in staffing and acquiring necessary commodities. Nevertheless, the 2021 LCAR Report showed that 86% of localities indicated requiring external assistance to maintain shelter operations.[2] The 2022 LCAR was not published in time to include in this report, due to delays in data collection from localities.

Resolving this situation must be a shared endeavor between various agencies and across jurisdictional levels. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is partnering with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) to examine these gaps and identify solutions. These discussions are in their infancy; however, winter weather events in 2021-2022 highlighted local shelter planning gaps and provided an opportunity for some of VDEM's regional planning staff to work with local emergency managers to help remediate some noted issues.

Although VDSS has no jurisdiction in local emergency management planning, the agency continues to look for opportunities to engage with VDEM and local planners to better understand and participate in their shelter planning efforts. This awareness has helped to subtly shape state shelter planning through recognition of systemic gaps.

Host and Regional Sheltering

Research of mutual aid and host shelter models in other states has uncovered some interesting plans. For instance, Louisiana and Texas have coordinated, developed, implemented and refined a unique state-level host sheltering agreement between their states to meet a portion of each state's large-scale event sheltering needs. Due to their proximity in the Gulf of Mexico and the frequency of the storm events there, they have had ample opportunity to utilize and refine this agreement to provide host shelter to each other.

All other identified mutual aid agreements are in-state between state and local or local to local jurisdictions. These agreements are often poorly defined with no incentive or consequence for participation or lack thereof. Georgia, for example, has a host shelter agreement that allows one county to host another with the support of state DSS staffing; the only incentive for a non-impacted county to assist is quick reimbursement from the state. That hasn't proven to be sufficient to encourage participation, and Georgia is looking at ways to improve their plan to engage more counties in hosting.

North Carolina has a somewhat different approach in having assigned host sheltering duties between coastal "risk" counties and inland host counties; however, that arrangement is also fraught

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with tension. Most recently during Hurricane Florence in 2018, some host counties balked at opening their shelters to their assigned risk partners.

Even with these challenges, VDSS and VDEM recognize that host sheltering offers a significant opportunity to dramatically increase shelter capacity statewide, and in many cases may keep evacuees closer to home. Thus, VDSS and VDEM continue to research best practices and explore ideas on how to develop and implement host sheltering for the Commonwealth. Incentives and legislative directives could significantly bolster these efforts.

VDSS and VDEM have also encouraged local jurisdictions to work together to develop plans for locally coordinated regional shelters (LCRS); however, LCRS plans currently only exist in Northern Virginia and Roanoke. The Hampton Roads area has begun discussing the development of a Local Regional Shelter System in which participating localities would combine resources to maintain larger shelters in centralized locations for smaller storms. Initial planning has faced several challenges as details about purpose and efficacy continue to be unclear.

State Sheltering

This past year saw a great deal of steady progress in planning and preparedness for the SCRS program. With no major shelter events, work initiated in 2021 was continued and refined. Still, the State Coordinated Regional Shelter plan (SCRS) is limited in both capacity and capability.

Sites

Currently, the SCRS Program only has total capacity of 7,618 people in the general population and 468 people in the medical population. The capacity of each of the SCR Shelters is presented in the table below (Table 1).

Northern Virginia Community College was deactivated as a SCRS site due to a conflicting designation as a State Transfer Point (STP). The site was better suited as a STP and so VDSS chose to remove NVCC as a SCRS option.

Table 1. SCRS Site Capacities

Site Name	Total General Pop. Capacity	Total Medical Pop. Capacity	Total Capacity	Co-Located Pet Shelter?
Christopher Newport	978	70	1048	No
George Mason University	1577	91	1668	Yes
James Madison University	462	12	474	No – located 4.3 miles away from campus
Longwood University	270	22	292	No
Paul D. Camp Community College	152	12	164	No
Patrick Henry Community College	111	6	117	No
Richard Bland College	119	12	131	Yes
University of Virginia	1105	54	1159	No
Virginia Commonwealth University	724	50	774	Yes
Virginia Military Institute	204	6	210	Yes

Virginia State University	203	14	217	Yes
Virginia Tech	1059	112	1171	Yes
College of William and Mary	654	7	661	No
Totals	**7618**	**468**	**8086**	**6**

Development of additional and alternative shelter sites remains a key focus at the state level. Additional sites are needed to boost capacity for large-scale evacuations, while alternative sites are needed to reduce dependence on and disruptions to Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) for shelter operations.

VDSS has collaborated with partner agencies, including VDEM and the Department of General Services (DGS), to try to identify additional and alternative sites for development.

The first possible solution was to identify additional state facilities that may have become recently available. Unfortunately, no additional state facilities were identified through DGS.

Another option was the post-pandemic use of Community Vaccination Center (CVC) sites. VDEM leadership was supportive of the idea of using their current CVC sites as future shelter sites. Although their initial list contained dozens of potential sites, only a few were developed to meet their needs for the pandemic. This development included engineering and ADA assessments. At the time of our discussion, their intent was to try to maintain these sites for future state use, which could include sheltering. While these sites were activated in the spring and fall of 2021 to support vaccination efforts, their future status and maintenance remains uncertain, making them an unreliable shelter resource.

Engineering and ADA Assessments

Both existing and proposed shelter sites need engineering and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (re)assessments to ensure they meet requirements for safety (wind rating, generator loads, etc) and legal compliance for accessibility for individuals with access and functional needs (AFN).

Following submission of the *2020-2021 Report to the General Assembly[3]*, the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) requested VDSS submit a funding proposal for shelter site assessments. The proposal included both Rapid Shelter Screening Criteria and ADA assessment, as well as Computer Aided Design (AutoCAD) mapping for shelter layouts. It also outlined a five year review and update cycle to "verify continued use and availability of pre-identified shelter sites and ensure building readiness as general public shelter during declared emergencies and provision for additional sites to increase state shelter capacity."[4] The General Assembly allocated $388,620 ($191,978GF; $196,642 Federal) in FY23 and FY24 to support this and other site assessment work.

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[3] 2020-2021 Report to the General Assembly Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Sheltering Capabilities and Readiness. (October 1, 2021). Virginia Department of Social Services.

[4] Fund State Shelter Review and Update Cycle Proposal. (November 2021). Virginia Department of Social Services.

Commodities

Commodities include the supplies, services, and equipment needed to support shelter operations from activation through demobilization. A substantial amount of work has been done to update and secure contracts to support shelter operations in an efficient and cost-effective manner that allows for quick mobilization of state shelters as needed.

Currently, the Commonwealth does not maintain a supply of commodities for SCRS due the inefficiency and high cost of maintaining supplies in "blue-skies," meaning times of non-disaster. Rather than keeping a warehouse of needed materials, the Commonwealth has opted to rely on private contracts to provide commodities at the time of disaster operations activation.

All state shelter partners updated and submitted their commodity lists for each shelter site in 2021. Partners were then asked to split their list between immediate needs (operational necessity pre-event through the first 72 hours) and sustained needs (operational sustainment beyond 72 hours). Splitting the list in this manner should allow for more efficient ordering of supplies to decrease the burden on contractors at the mobilization stage of shelter activation. Although most agencies split their lists, some agencies need to have all their supplies up front.

VDSS, VDEM and DGS worked extensively to refine the commodity list and craft a proposal to attract the most competitive contracts, including:

- Developing a more comprehensively detailed list to avoid purchasing products that are similar to but don't actually meet the need. An example from 2018 is scissors: 'scissors' was listed with no description, so the vendor provided child safety scissors instead of adult scissors.
- Allowing vendors to include as many subcontractors as were needed to provide the full array of goods and services listed in the RFP.
- Crafting a detailed Request for Proposal (RFP). This allowed vendors to bid on servicing specific sites. For instance, some vendors may not be able to support multiple sites across the state but may be able to support more localized sites in their region.

The final RFP was posted in May 2022 with a due date for proposals in July 2022. Four bids were submitted and are currently under review.

Staffing

Shelter staffing is a critical component of the SCRS plan, and staff are often in short supply for emergency activations. VDSS and its shelter planning partners have made strides towards closing the gap in staffing and ensure a readily available emergency workforce.

All agencies providing staffing support are responsible for identifying their own staff and volunteers or contracting staff support to fulfill their roles within the state shelter. These roles include:

- Shelter management and general population support (VDSS).
- Support for medical and environmental health services [Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Medical Reserve Corps].
- Pet sheltering [Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)].

- Security [Virginia State Police (VSP) and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA)]
- Behavioral health [Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)].
- Access and functional needs support (VDEM).
- Information technology [Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA)]; and
- Facility management, Public Information Officer, and fire watch staff (IHEs).

The table below (Table 2) demonstrates how many staff would be needed at each shelter site. A more detailed list of required staff can be found in each site's commodity list.

Table 2. SCRS Staff Requirements (24 hour period)

Site Name	DSS Shelter Management Team	DSS General Staff	Total DSS Staff	Total Staff Including Partner Agencies
Christopher Newport	6	50	56	202
George Mason University	8	78	86	281
James Madison University	6	28	34	155
Longwood University	6	22	28	114
Paul D. Camp Community College	6	16	22	94
Patrick Henry Community College	6	14	20	98
Richard Bland College	8	16	24	127
University of Virginia	12	54	66	268
Virginia Commonwealth University	6	40	46	175
Virginia Military Institute	6	18	24	133
Virginia State University	6	20	26	113
Virginia Tech	8	52	60	185
College of William and Mary	6	36	42	184
Totals	**90**	**444**	**534**	**2129**

In 2021, VDSS coordinated with SCRS stakeholders to execute its first ever rostering exercise – Virtual Activation and Rostering Exercise (VAREX). VAREX 2021 tested if state agencies could provide adequate staff if three shelters were activated simultaneously. Theoretically, the VDSS Emergency Workforce (EW) could provide enough Shelter Specialists to support 1075 evacuees. There are enough Shelter Managers to support 2 simultaneous sites, unless one of those sites is UVA. The results from VAREX 2021 indicate that staffing capabilities were slightly less than theorized. This is explained by situational conditions of the EW's availability to deploy at the moment of the exercise. The results of the exercise are demonstrated below in Chart 1. VDSS plans to exercise rostering capabilities in a 2022 iteration of VAREX in late August 2022.

Chart 1. Bar Graph of VAREX Results by Agency

VAREX Results
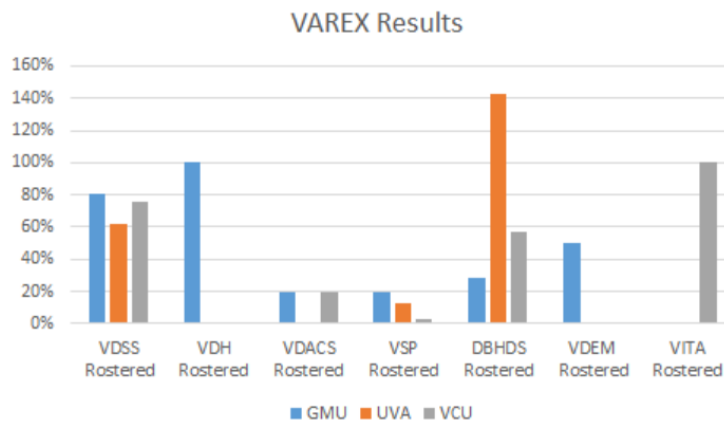
Following the 2021 VAREX, VDSS worked diligently to expand its Emergency Workforce (EW) through regular recruitment of both new and existing agency staff. Outreach included discussion of emergency plans and workforce needs during New Employee Orientation (NEO), recruitment messages sent semi-annually from the VDSS Office of the Commissioner, and requests sent to the existing workforce to refer colleagues.

VDSS developed an application process to gather individual information and mandate supervisor approval to build a more robust EW program. This data allows VDSS to potentially deploy the EW geographically (as allowed by the size and scope of the event) and improve its ability to message critical information in multiple formats outside of the regular workday.

To further support recruitment, VDSS developed an Emergency Workforce Information Session to provide detailed information on EW roles, responsibilities, and benefits. These sessions allow interested VDSS agency staff to ask questions and better understand how they can provide critical support to the Commonwealth during disasters.

VDEM has made significant progress in supporting the EW with the Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW). A coordinator was hired in late 2021 to recruit and retain employees from other state agencies to meet staffing needs for mass care and other types of emergencies as identified. In July 2022, VDEM began actively recruiting AEW members with great success. One of the roles the AEW candidates can sign up for is to be a shelter specialist. So far, 155 applications have been received from the AEW for the Shelter Specialist role, 20 individuals have completed some of the training, and 3 members have completed all training required to deploy.

One of the most serious challenges is the lack of a system to manage EW staff. VDSS currently utilizes a spreadsheet to manage personal information, volunteer role, training needed / completed, exercise participation, Statewide Alert Network (SWAN) response, deployment status based on training completion, and follow up outreach for those who haven't responded to training, exercise, or SWAN messaging. This application is unwieldy to use and individually update. A volunteer management software system would better facilitate this process. Many of these products allow individuals to update their own contact information and provide their availability, track training needed / completed, and allow for individual and group messaging from within the system itself. Furthermore, they allow for more complex reporting than the simple filter reporting in Excel.

The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) has also worked to expand its available staff. Most of its SCRS staff comes from local Community Service Boards (CSBs),

and DBHDS has met with these local units in areas around identified state shelters to form agreements and help them to understand the activation process and staffing needs. This work will help ensure the CSBs understand the expectations and can appropriately deploy staff when called upon by DBHDS to meet the need at state shelters.

VDSS, in discussions with VDEM and DGS, also queried state partner agencies to identify any gaps that could potentially be filled with contract staff through existing state contracts. VDSS, VDH and DBHDS identified some roles that they could quickly train contract staff to support. VITA already maintains a contract for their required shelter staff.

Training

Preparing staff to support SCRS operations is critical to success. VDSS training includes getting the EW ready for deployment and providing them with the knowledge and tools they need to be successful while deployed. Proactively identifying and developing material to support training needs is important to not only prepare staff, but also to build morale and team camaraderie in advance of a deployment. This is accomplished through interactive training that encourages participation, solicits ideas for improvement, and addresses the concerns of the workforce.

VDSS updated all of its basic training courses in 2020, and developed one new required and several optional courses to support mass care deployment in 2021. A training cycle was implemented in 2022 requiring all EW staff to complete basic training once every three years, and take one optional course of their choice per year in between basic training.

There are two existing required courses (Introduction to the SCRS Plan and Shelter Specialist training) for the EW and a variety of optional courses. VDSS now requires all EW staff to complete the Statewide Alert Network (SWAN) Overview and How-To Guide, which provides an orientation to the SWAN system and details how to properly respond and collect information.

New optional courses and ongoing training opportunities include:
- Shelter Management Team (SMT) Workshops which allow the SMT staff to get acquainted and work together in management and problem solving via scenario-based training.
- Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Assistance in a Mass Care Setting, which provides a basic overview of supporting individuals with AFN in shelters and other mass care activities.
- Psychological First Aid (PFA), which outlines basic self-care activities for survivors of and staff responding to an emergency event.
- Radio Use Training, which teaches people how to operate a radio; and
- Trauma Informed Care (TICA), which focuses on a methodical approach to address stressful situations and interactions using empathy and compassion
- Statewide Alert Network (SWAN) Overview and How-To Guide which provides an orientation to the SWAN system and details how to properly respond and collect information

VDSS also annually records its basic courses for Shelter Management and Specialists to provide an updated just-in-time refresher tool in the event of an emergency.

Additionally, VDSS conducted several training education and exercise events to reinforce training concepts, including:

- A deployment preparedness exercise (virtual) that encouraged the EW to review both the contents of their "Go Kit" and their personal emergency plans for their family when they are called up to serve.
- A shelter scenarios exercise (virtual) where EW attendees broke into small groups lead by SMT members to discuss how shelter staff can/should respond in various situations.
- Inclusion of the shelter management team as observers at the University of Virginia SCRS staff orientation and shelter opening tabletop exercise; and
- The Virtual Activation and Roster Exercise (VAREX) 2022, giving the EW the opportunity to engage in and respond to simulated deployment messaging. The VAREX also allows all partner agencies to get a "snapshot" of their actual staffing availability, as all agency staff respond in real time with their actual availability.

While VDSS continues to transition back to in-person activity, many of the training sessions are still conducted virtually. The virtual platform provides greater flexibility and range for EW members to access the trainings, but there are limitations to virtual interaction that have made retention challenging. There is little opportunity to do any team building or other activities virtually that help to attract new and connect existing staff to the EW program. Moving forward, VDSS looks for avenues to safely integrate virtual and in-person training and exercise opportunities that add value, relevance, and a sense of connection among its EW.

Shelter Registration

The 2020-2021 report detailed a web-based evacuee registration system known as the Emergency Tracking Network (ETN) that VDSS and VDEM had been testing. It also detailed a basic electronic registration tool VDSS had developed to use for the 2021 hurricane season while work was being completed on the ETN system. There have been several significant developments with each of these systems.

Work on the ETN system was paused while VDEM supported the state COVID vaccination effort. VDEM notified VDSS in early fall 2021 that work on ETN was going to be placed on indefinite hold as it resumed priority updates in the WebEOC platform. At that time, with no production timeline available for ETN, VDSS committed to enhancing its basic registration tool to fill the void in the meantime. VDSS named its registration system the Evacuee Accountability System (EVACS).

Work on basic reporting functions in EVACS was completed and demonstrated in fall 2021; this completed the original project proposal. While EVACS is functional and ready to support state shelters to meet basic registration needs, it could be significantly enhanced to support related needs in tracking evacuees from collection points and reception centers who are in route to state shelters. It could also provide more functionality in working with evacuees who are registered into the system in terms of accessing their information for health and safety needs related to shelter operations. EVACS is an internal VDSS product and is not shareable with local shelter partners. For that reason, it does not compare to a universal registration tool such as ETN. Also, EVACS does not automatically update the Mass Care Sites – ESF 6 board in WebEOC, creating a gap in real-time data availability within the VEST as well as for external partners including localities.

In May 2022, the Hampton Roads/FEMA Mass Care Workshop highlighted the need for a statewide electronic registration system. VDEM and VDSS restarted the effort to identify an electronic platform capable of shelter registration at all levels. VDSS recommends ETN as the preferred platform. ETN would be shareable with local jurisdictions and integrates with WebEOC allowing for

real-time data sharing. Progress has begun anew on this project, but is still in initial phases of discussion, with no set timeline for completion.

Conclusion

In summary, while progress continues to be made in various aspects of the Commonwealth of Virginia's sheltering system, there remain challenges in meeting its potential sheltering needs. A large majority of localities reported that they require external assistance to sufficiently operate disaster shelters.

The Commonwealth lacks a comprehensive host sheltering program. Regional sheltering is nearly non-existent and localities who are exploring the concept face significant challenges. The SCRS plan provides a means of support for localities when they are overwhelmed in a disaster, however, it is not adequate to meet the predicted need in a catastrophic event.

VDSS makes the following recommendations to improve the Commonwealth's Shelter Capabilities and Readiness:

- VDEM should consider gathering specific data from localities on shelter capabilities, not just capacities, through the LCAR Report to better understand gaps
- VDEM and VDSS should work together to create and publicize sheltering support templates for localities to utilize in a disaster through the Statewide Mutual Aid program
- VDSS and DGS should work together to identify and prepare contracts/agreements for additional or alternative SCRS sites
- VDEM should explore options for developing a volunteer management software system or database to manage the EW/AEW
- VDEM and VDSS should work together to explore strategies to expand EW/AEW with motivated recruitment and prepare them through comprehensive training courses

These recommendations should address the gaps identified in this report and should improve the state of sheltering in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It is important to note that these recommendations are not exhaustive, and actions taken to improve sheltering should not be limited to just these focused suggestions.