James Hunter Williams
Commissioner

December 18, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Janet V. Kelly
Secretary of Health & Human Services

The Honorable Terrence C. Cole
Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Michael Maul, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: James H. Williams *James Williams*

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

This report is submitted in compliance with Item 333.A. of the 2024 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 have questions, please contact me at (804) 726-7011.

JW:kc
Attachment

cc: The Honorable Janet V. Kelly, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

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REPORT MANDATE

This report is submitted in compliance with the Virginia Acts of the Assembly – Item 333.A. of the 2024 Appropriation Act which states:

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 committees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the status of the State Managed Shelter program and summarizes other VDSS supported work to improve shelter capabilities and increase overall readiness throughout the Commonwealth.

The State Managed Shelter (SMS) Program has the capacity to shelter 5,833 people and 1,949 pets across 26 facilities at 13 pre-identified sites at various Institutes of Higher Education (IHE). During the annual Virtual Activation and Rostering Exercise (VAREX), partner state agencies and VDSS demonstrated adequate staffing for three sites (Virginia Tech, Longwood University, and Virginia State University) providing shelter for 1,405 evacuees and 833 pets. The 2020 SMS plan was separated into a base plan with various annexes. This year, these separate parts were combined into one complete plan. Each IHE has their own site-specific addendum that was updated this year as well. VDSS continues to expand and train the Emergency Workforce (EW), supplementing staffing capabilities with the Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW).

VDSS has also made efforts to increase overall readiness throughout the Commonwealth by gathering a workgroup to begin identifying alternative "just-in-time" shelter sites, supporting the creation of a Commonwealth-wide Shelter Strategy, and advocating for the development of an interoperable shelter registration system.

DEFINITIONS

Emergency Workforce (EW)

The Emergency Workforce (EW) is composed of VDSS employees who volunteer to be temporarily reassigned to support mass care needs during a disaster; in many cases they assist those who have nowhere to go when a disaster strikes.

Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW)

The AEW is made up of employees from all state agencies. AEW members can be offered temporary reassignment to close critical staffing gaps to support the Commonwealth's response to an emergency event. Some members of the Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW) supplement VDSS employees in the EW during an incident requiring the activation of the State Managed Shelter Program.

Just-In-Time

A management strategy wherein resources are acquired only as needed to minimize inventory levels and improve program efficiency.

State Managed Shelter (SMS)

The State Managed Shelter (SMS) program uses state resources to augment local shelter capacity during a catastrophic incident requiring sheltering where local resources are overwhelmed.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

While sheltering is primarily a local responsibility, the Commonwealth created the State Managed Shelter program to augment local shelter capacity during a catastrophic sheltering event where local resources are overwhelmed. The Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan tasks the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) with leading the State Managed Shelter program with support from the Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (VDBHDS), the State Police (VSP), the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), the Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA), and the Department of Emergency Management (VDEM).

This report describes the status of the State Managed Shelter program and summarizes other VDSS supported work to improve shelter capabilities and increase overall readiness throughout the Commonwealth. For comprehensive information including local emergency shelter capabilities and readiness, please see the annual Virginia Comprehensive Emergency Management Report.

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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA EMERGENCY SHELTER CAPABILITIES AND READINESS

SECTION 1: STATE MANAGED SHELTER (SMS) PROGRAM

This report describes current program capacity and capability of the State Managed Shelter (SMS) program and the maintenance conducted on the SMS plan to keep it up to date.

The 2023 Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness Report to the General Assembly made the following recommendations to maintain the SMS program:
- Develop a volunteer management software system or database to manage the EW and the AEW.
- Continue to expand EW/AEW with motivated recruitment and prepare them through comprehensive training courses and exercises.

This report provides information on the progress made to implement each of the recommendations made in previous years and how the recommendations should be adjusted.

PROGRAM CAPACITY

The SMS program relies on partner Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) to provide sites to host state shelter operations. The current capacity or each pre-identified IHE site is demonstrated in Table 2. Capacities are separated by categories: General, Medical, and Pet. VDSS is primarily responsible for the overall operations and the general population dormitory. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is primarily responsible for the medical needs of the population. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) is primarily responsible for the pet population. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (VDBHDS) provides behavioral health support, counseling, and psychological first aid services. The Virginia State Police (VSP) provides security during shelter operations. Virginia IT Agency (VITA) provides technological support to the SMS program.

TABLE 1: CURRENT CAPACITY OF SMS FACILITIES

| Facility Name	Capacity Type		
	General	Medical	Pet
Christopher Newport University - Freeman Center	681	110	0
George Mason University - Fieldhouse	797	0	0
George Mason University - HUB	0	0	170
George Mason University - Recreation and Athletic Center	483	148	0
James Madison University - Godwin Hall	290	0	143
Longwood University - Brock Commons Garage	0	0	664
Longwood University - Recreation Center	211	0	0
Longwood University - Willet Hall	0	203	0
Patrick & Henry Community College - Philpott Technical Center	0	32	0
Patrick & Henry Community College - Stone Hall	139	0	0
Paul D. Camp Community College - Main Building	0	0	75
Paul D. Camp Community College - Workforce Development Center	72	14	0
Richard Bland College - Barn Theater	0	0	75
Richard Bland College - Statesman Hall	101	24	0
UVA - North Grounds Recreation Center	184	36	0
VCU - Bowe Street Parking Deck	0	0	285
VCU - Siegel Center	549	84	0
VCU- Sports Medicine Center	0	0	0
Virginia Horse Center	0	0	230
Virginia Military Institute - Cameron Hall	144	9	0
Virginia State University - Multipurpose Center	330	118	0
Virginia State University - Randolph Farm Service Center and Head House	0	0	45
Virginia Tech - Cassell Coliseum	345	0	0
Virginia Tech – McComas	207	10	0
Virginia Tech - Alphin-Stuart Livestock Arena	0	0	263
William & Mary - McCormack-Nagelsen Tennis Center	508	4	0
Total	**5,041**	**792**	**1,950**

The capacity for SMS facilities is slightly lower than the previous year because James Madison University rescinded the Atlantic Union Bank Center and the Convocation Center as available facilities, and Virginia Tech's War Memorial Gym is under renovation.

STAFFING CAPABILITY

The annual Virtual Activation and Rostering Exercise (VAREX) provides the most accurate status of staffing capability. The VAREX was conducted in February 2024. VDSS demonstrated adequate staffing for three sites (Virginia Tech, Longwood University, and Virginia State University) providing shelter for 1,405 evacuees and 833 pets. Figure 1 illustrates what percentage of required staff for each site that each partner agency was able to provide. There is some artificiality to the exercise as some partner agencies did not complete the exercise. All partners are invited to participate each year, however, due to staff turnover and concurrent real-life activities, some agencies could not fully participate. In a real activation, VDSS fully expects these partner agencies to provide some level of staffing for each activated site.

If an agency cannot provide adequate staffing to meet the population need, VDEM has identified contractors that may be able to supply staff. While this was an incredibly valuable secondary capability discovered by VDEM, it comes with a greater cost, increased variability in quality of personnel, and delayed activation time. Each partner agency should continue to bolster their internal staffing capabilities so as not to become fully dependent on private contractors.

Figure 1: VAREX 2024: Percentage of Required Staff Rostered
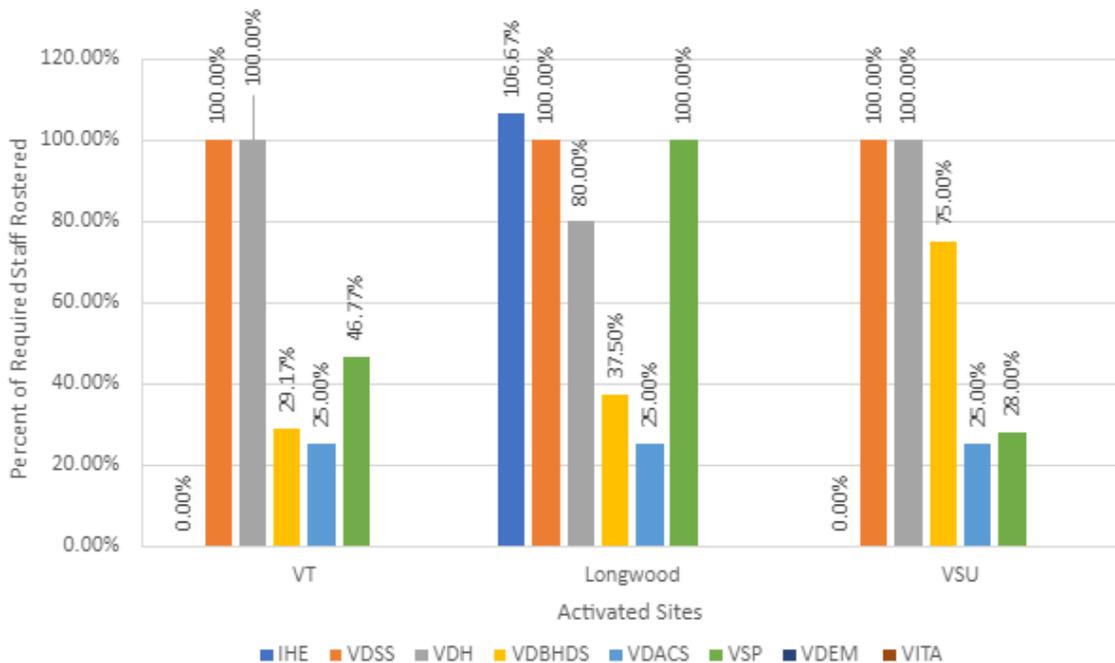
Shelters are staffed for 12-hour shifts, 24 hours a day. Therefore, to understand the full staffing requirement of shelter operations, Table 1 demonstrates the total number of different people needed for 2 shifts.

Table 2: Staffing Requirements for a 24–hour period

Site Name	Total DSS Staff Needed	Total Staff Needed, Including Part- ner Agencies
Christopher Newport	56	202
George Mason University	86	281
James Madison University	34	155
Longwood University	38	101
Paul D. Camp Community College	22	94
Patrick Henry Community College	20	98
Richard Bland College	24	127
University of Virginia	30	116
Virginia Commonwealth University	46	175
Virginia Military Institute	20	96
Virginia State University	26	113
Virginia Tech	60	185
College of William and Mary	36	172
Totals	**498**	**1915**

PLAN UPDATES

All aspects of the SMS plan were updated in 2024. The 2020 plan was organized as a base plan with three annexes: Annex A – Congregate Sheltering, Annex B: Non-Congregate Sheltering, and Annex C- Shelter Resident Transition. The 2024 update combined these separate parts into one complete plan.

This comprehensive plan was updated with input from the planning members from partner agencies and with data from the 2023 Full Scale Exercise at Virginia Tech. Key changes include minimizing the focus on non-congregate sheltering, emphasizing the operations of congregate sheltering, detailing the demobilization process, and clarifying all position descriptions.

This update is anticipated to be signed and published in Fall 2024. While plan updates may occur ad hoc, the next scheduled update is 2026.

SITE SPECIFIC PLANNING

In 2023, 12 out of the 13 pre-identified Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) were assessed to create site plans complete with appropriate shelter layout calculations and ADA evaluations. The only IHE without a completed site assessment in 2023 was Virginia Tech due to their largest facility being under renovation. In June 2024, the War Memorial Gym was safe enough for a preliminary walkthrough by VDSS and partner agencies, however, a complete assessment cannot be completed until the renovation is complete and the facility is ready for public use. The completion date of this renovation project was pushed back to Fall 2024.

George Mason University (GMU), University of Virginia (UVA), and Virginia Tech (VT) maintain their own Temporary Occupancy Certificates (TOCs) with their internal building officials. VDSS submits and manages the TOCs for the remaining 10 IHEs with the Department of General Services (DGS) Division of Engineering and Building (DEB). The TOCs for these sites have been renewed annually from the original site plans created at the inception of the SMS program more than a decade ago. With the new site plans created from the 2023 site assessments, VDSS submitted for new TOCs for each facility.

Once the TOCs were processed and approved in July 2024, VDSS updated each IHE's site specific addendum. Each site-specific addendum includes detailed commodity and staffing requirements that were updated and verified before sending to signatories for approval.

EMERGENCY WORKFORCE AND ADJUNCT EMERGENCY WORKFORCE

The Emergency Workforce (EW) is made up of VDSS personnel who volunteer f or disaster deployment in mass care operations and is bolstered by VDEM's Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW). The workforce demonstrates dedication to the program through engagement in trainings and team building meet ups. The capacity of the Shelter Management Team increased significantly this year as more members stepped up to the call for roles with greater responsibilities. The training and exercise program for shelter staff continues to grow more robust as additional exercises are incorporated into the training cycle every year.

VDSS continues to expand the EW and supplement staffing capabilities with AEW. The AEW is a VDEM program to recruit employees from any state agency to volunteer for a disaster response role. VDEM has also initiated the development of a database to manage AEW membership. Further detail can be requested from VDEM about the database.

Additionally, a new role was created after a gap was identified in VAREX 2024: the Logistics and Supply Supervisor. This role has been defined and developed by VDSS and recruitment for the position was initiated with the Governor's annual public message urging state employees to join the AEW.

Between the AEW and the EW, there are currently 272 staff signed up for the Shelter Specialist program. Of those 272 people, 112 have completed their training and are deployable, and 155 could be deployed with "just-in-time" training. Thirty-five of the 112 fully deployable members are trained as part of the Shelter Management Team. While the overall number of people in the workforce has decreased by 49 members from the previous year, the number of fully trained staff increased by 17 people. Membership of the Shelter Management Team increased by 9.

TRAINING AND EXERCISE

VDSS is constantly preparing staff to support SMS operations and fulfill their roles in the shelter. VDSS training includes getting the people 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.

Current training requirements are that all AEW/EW staff 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 in basic training. Optional courses and ongoing training opportunities include:
- 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.
- Trauma Informed Care (TICA), which focuses on a methodical approach to address stressful situations and interactions using empathy and compassion.
- Shelter Management Team (SMT) Orientation, which trains interested and qualified shelter specialists to be shift supervisors; and
- SMT Workshops, which allow staff to get acquainted and work together in management and problem solve via scenario-based training.

Of the 112 members of the workforce who have completed all required training, 62 have also taken one or more optional courses in the past year. This demonstrates active participation and dedication from the workforce to the sheltering mission.

Additionally, VDSS conducted several training education and exercise events to reinforce training concepts, including:
- A deployment preparedness exercise (virtual) 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.

- The Virtual Activation and Roster Exercise (VAREX) engaged the EW/AEW to respond to simulated deployment messaging. VAREX also allowed all partner agencies to get a "snapshot" of their actual staffing availability, as all agency staff respond in real time with their availability in real time.

- The Trauma Informed Care Exercise (TICEX) was newly created this year and provided staff with practical applications of the Trauma Informed Care Approach (TICA) with simulated scenarios.

The Shelter Management Team meets every other month for one hour to discuss workshop policy changes, participate in mini drills related to their roles, and become more familiar with each other. These meetings are voluntary but well attended. Participants regularly display an eager willingness to maintain a greater level of preparedness. This is crucial to building confidence in providing effective sheltering.

SECTION 2: SHELTERING BEYOND THE SMS PROGRAM

The previous annual report recommended the following items to support the sheltering capabilities in the Commonwealth beyond the current SMS program.
- Create a list of potential "just-in-time" SMS sites and complete programmatic assessments of each potential site.
- Complete the Shelter Strategy Framework Project
  - Define sheltering standards in Virginia
  - Establish capability targets
  - Identify actionable solutions to minimize sheltering gaps
- Continue the work from the Shelter Strategy Framework Project by creating prioritized implementation plans for identified solutions.
- Identify, fund, and implement a universal state and local electronic shelter registration software program.

Some progress has been made on these recommendations, yet none of the items have been completed. This report describes what work has been done to expand sheltering capabilities throughout the Commonwealth.

ALTERNATE "JUST-IN-TIME" SITES

The 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 IHEs for shelter operations.

VDSS continues to collaborate with partner agencies, including VDEM and DGS, to try to identify additional and alternative solutions. VDSS has gathered a multi-agency working group to identify and assess "just-in-time" facilities. These facilities would not be contracted until a disaster response activation required state sheltering. During non-disaster times, the list of potential facilities would require maintenance as facilities would need to pass an initial assessment to determine that ADA and building code requirements are met and then be routinely updated to reflect availability and facility changes.

COMMONWEALTH SHELTER STRATEGY PROJECT

VDEM contracted a Shelter Project Coordinator in March 2022 for a two-year project to develop a shelter strategy for the Commonwealth. The goals of the project were to define sheltering standards in Virginia, establish shelter capability targets, and identify actionable solutions to minimize sheltering gaps.

VDSS worked with VDEM to lead a working group of local, regional, tribal, and state partners to define sheltering standards, identify capability targets, understand sheltering gaps across the Commonwealth, and propose actionable solutions to minimize sheltering gaps. Representatives from 17 localities, 4 nonprofits, 7 state agencies, and FEMA contributed to the shelter strategy framework. Five focus groups were also established to address critical components of sheltering: Access and Functional Needs (AFN), Feeding, Health/Medical, Non-congregate Sheltering, and Pet Sheltering.

Across all local jurisdictions that reported their shelter capacities in WebEOC, the average shelter capacity in relation to the total jurisdictional population was 2.33%. The shelter strategy workgroup established a baseline average shelter space capacity target of 2.5% of the total jurisdictional population. Eight localities provided data on their staffing capabilities, demonstrating an average capability to staff the shelter 1.42% of their population. The working group decided that 1.5% capability target in relation to the total population was reasonable. The Commonwealth should periodically reevaluate its capabilities, capacities, and targets with the aim of continuous improvement. This strategy of incremental improvement should result in effective and positive change.

The main solutions identified in the project were as follows:
- Strengthen local shelter staffing capabilities by creating standardized training and job aids.
- Improve accessibility of existing shelters or replacing inaccessible shelters with newer facilities that meet ADA requirements.
- Identify an interoperable registration system.

- Develop a tiered structure for sheltering to meet the needs of sheltering beyond a single locality through multi-jurisdictional sheltering.
- Support preparedness efforts through plan and exercise templates and guidance from the Commonwealth.

The sheltering strategy framework was completed and sent to VDEM leadership in May 2024. This is the first step to long-term sheltering stability in Virginia. After approval and release of the strategy framework, the next steps will be prioritizing how to diminish capability gaps and creating implementation plans for proposed solutions. It will be crucial to continue the work started with the strategy framework so that solutions are implemented effectively throughout Virginia.

UNIVERSAL ELECTRONIC SHELTER REGISTRATION SOFTWARE

A universal state and local electronic shelter registration software was recommended in this annual report in 2022 and in 2023, and again in the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy. Having an electronic registration tool that is interoperable between various parties and responsible for sheltering would streamline the entire process, allowing for better sheltering operations throughout the Commonwealth. However, without an agency specifically tasked with this responsibility and appropriately resourced for implementation, this solution cannot be brought to fruition.

CONCLUSION

In summary, various steps have been taken to improve sheltering capabilities and readiness in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Actions taken have been either to enhance local sheltering capabilities or to maintain and increase the capabilities of the SMS plan.

VDSS does not recommend any new course of action and believes that progress needs to continue with the recommendations identified last year. Those recommendations are summarized here:
- Socialize the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy to all localities and create implementation plans for identified solutions.
- Create and maintain a list of potential "just-in-time" SMS sites.
- Refine the volunteer management software system or database to manage the EW and the AEW.
- Identify, fund, and assign responsibility for implementing a universal state and local electronic shelter registration software program.

These recommendations, while not exhaustive, should address the gaps identified in this report and should improve the state of sheltering in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These recommendations are not time-limited and may take more than one year to complete.

APPENDIX A:ITEM 333.A. OF THE 2024 APPROPRIATION ACT

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.