



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
*Office of the Commissioner*

October 30, 2025

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** The Honorable Glenn Youngkin  
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Luke E. Torian  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

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

Michael Maul  
Director, Department of Planning and Budget

**FROM:** Kevin Erskine 

**SUBJECT:** Annual Report on Enhanced Electronic Identity Validation

This report is submitted pursuant to Item 334.H. of the 2025 Appropriation Act, which states:

*Out of this appropriation, \$805,000 the second year from the general fund and \$805,000 the second year from nongeneral funds are provided to implement enhanced electronic identity validation services. The department shall report the impact of these services to the Director, Department of Planning and Budget and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by October 1 of each year.*

Please contact me should you have questions at (804) 726-7011.

KE:kc  
Attachment

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



# Enhanced Electronic Identity Validation Services

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# ENHANCED ELECTRONIC IDENTITY VALIDATION SERVICES

A Report for the Virginia General Assembly

October 01, 2025

## REPORT MANDATE

*Item 334.H of the 2025 Appropriations Act provides:*

Out of this appropriation, \$805,000 the second year from the general fund and \$805,000 the second year from nongeneral funds are provided to implement enhanced electronic identity validation services. The department shall report the impact of these services to the Director, Department of Planning and Budget and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by October 1 of each year.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) currently requires applicants to create unique login credentials and answer multiple security questions to access benefits through CommonHelp. While functional, this process can be time-consuming and difficult to navigate—often resulting in user frustration, duplicate accounts, and increased demand for customer support. Additionally, current identity verification measures are limited, making it difficult to proactively prevent fraud and ensure accurate program delivery.

To address these challenges, VDSS plans to implement enhanced electronic identity verification (EIV) within its upcoming rebuilt client-facing portal, CommonHelp. The new system will be procured through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, expected to be released toward the end of 2025, with a contract award anticipated in 2026. As EIV will be integrated into the redesigned platform, VDSS will not be able to fully report on its impact until the new portal goes live, which is projected for Fall 2027.

### About VDSS and Benefit Programs

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) partners with local departments of social services and community organizations, to promote the well-being of children and families across the Commonwealth. We proudly serve alongside nearly 13,000 state and local human services professionals throughout the Social Services System, who ensure that thousands of Virginia's most vulnerable citizens have access to the best services and benefits available to them.

Together, we work each day to serve, empower, and create opportunities for brighter futures.

Benefit Programs administers a range of public assistance programs designed to support the health, nutrition, and economic stability of individuals and families across the Commonwealth. This includes Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP), and the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP).

## DEFINITIONS

### *Enhanced Identity Verification (EIV)*

Enhanced Identity Verification (EIV) is an advanced, multi-faceted process used in online applications to confirm a user's identity with greater certainty than traditional methods, often by combining digital data, document analysis, and biometric data like facial recognition, to build greater digital trust and prevent fraud. It goes beyond a simple username and password by using sophisticated technologies and data points to verify a person's authenticity for security and regulatory compliance.

### *Single Sign On (SSO)*

Single Sign-On services allow users to access multiple applications or systems with one set of login credentials, improving user experience and security by reducing the need to remember multiple usernames and passwords.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CommonHelp is the Virginia Department of Social Services' self-service online portal that allows individuals to apply for and manage benefit programs such as SNAP, TANF, Medical Assistance, Energy Assistance, and Child Care Subsidy. It serves as a central access point for Virginians to connect with essential services and track the status of their applications.

## CONTACTS

### AUTHOR

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# Enhanced Electronic Identity Validation Services

## SECTION 1 CURRENT STATUS

CommonHelp is the Virginia Department of Social Services' (VDSS) self-service online portal that allows individuals to apply for and manage benefit programs including:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
- Medical Assistance,
- Energy Assistance, and
- Child Care Subsidy.

It serves as a central access point for Virginians to connect with essential services and track the status of their applications.

To apply for benefits through CommonHelp, customers must create a new account from scratch, adhere to strict password requirements, and answer five preset security questions along with one personalized question. If an email address is provided, users must authenticate their identity through email verification; however, if no email is entered, the verification step is skipped entirely, potentially weakening account security. This process can be time-consuming and frustrating, particularly for individuals with limited digital literacy. It also creates multiple drop-off points where users may abandon the application altogether.

## SECTION 2 INCORPORATING ENHANCED IDENTITY VERIFICATION

VDSS plans to use the allocated funds to implement enhanced identity verification (EIV) within its upcoming rebuilt client-facing portal, CommonHelp. This system rebuild will be procured through a competitive Request for Proposal process, anticipated to be released toward the end of 2025, with a contract award expected in 2026. As EIV will be integrated into the redesigned CommonHelp platform, VDSS will not be able to report on its full impact until the new portal launches, which is projected for Quarter 1 of Fiscal Year 2027.

## SECTION 3 DESIRED STATE

The desired state for EIV at VDSS includes implementing enhanced, secure, and user-friendly digital identity tools in the CommonHelp portal that streamline access to benefit programs while maintaining strong protections against fraud and misuse.

EIV would provide a reliable and standardized method to confirm the identity of applicants at the point of entry, regardless of email usage or digital literacy level. By partnering with third-party verification providers, VDSS can reduce reliance on inconsistent self-attestation methods (e.g., secret questions), helping to prevent duplicate or fraudulent applications while improving user confidence in the system. Strong identity verification serves as a frontline defense against benefit fraud and errors by ensuring that only eligible individuals with verified identities are able to access services, thereby protecting public funds and program integrity.

The integration of Single Sign-On (SSO) services in CommonHelp would further support a seamless customer experience by allowing users to:

- Eliminate the need to remember multiple passwords and usernames.
- Reduce confusion and administrative burden, especially for households receiving multiple types of assistance.
- Maintain continuity in the customer journey across applications, renewals, and case management tools.

Together, these enhancements would promote a secure and efficient digital environment that reduces abandonment rates, increases automation, and boosts overall customer satisfaction. The desired state supports the Commonwealth's broader digital transformation efforts and aligns with best practices in identity security, fraud prevention, and user-centered benefit delivery.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, VDSS' planned enhancements to the CommonHelp portal, including the implementation of advanced EIV and SSO capabilities, represent a critical step toward modernizing benefit access while strengthening security and user experience. By adopting EIV methods, VDSS aims to reduce fraud, errors, and improve customer satisfaction. The outcome will ensure that eligible Virginians can securely and efficiently obtain the assistance they need. The upcoming portal redesign and integration of these technologies align with the Commonwealth's commitment to digital innovation and program integrity, positioning CommonHelp as a trusted and accessible platform for the future.

## **APPENDIX A: 2025 APPROPRIATIONS ACT, ITEM 334.H**

*Item 334.H of the 2025 Appropriations Act provides*

H. Out of this appropriation, \$805,000 the second year from the general fund and \$805,000 the second year from nongeneral funds are provided to implement enhanced electronic identity validation services. The department shall report the impact of these services to the Director, Department of Planning and Budget and the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by October 1 of each year.