

Restorative Housing in the Virginia Department of Corrections

FY2025 Report



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October 1, 2025



Authority

This report has been prepared and submitted to fulfill the requirements of Chapter 516 of the Acts of Assembly of 2019.¹ This provision requires the Department of Corrections to report certain information pertaining to the agency's Restrictive Housing and Shared Allied Management programs to the Governor, the Chairmen of the House Committee on Militia, Police and Public Safety and the Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services, and the Clerks of the House of Delegates and the Senate by October 1st of each year.²

Background

For many years, correctional systems across the nation have relied on segregation as a management status for inmates deemed as a risk to the safety of other incarcerated inmates or prison staff. Typically, inmates were assigned to a static period of "Disciplinary Segregation" because of a conviction for an institutional infraction, or to "Administrative Segregation" due to assaultive and disruptive behaviors at lower security level prisons, escape histories, or extremely violent and notorious crimes. Inmates were managed constitutionally, but with high security controls, limiting opportunities for socialization with other inmates. Segregation practices often lacked articulable standards allowing progression into lower security levels or general population.

Since 2011, the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) has remained dedicated to a culture change reducing the use of segregation. VADOC spearheaded an organizational shift, mitigating the risk associated with direct release of inmates managed in segregation through the "Step-Down" program at Wallens Ridge and Red Onion State Prisons. The Step-Down program focuses on risk reduction and risk control. Participants can progress to a general population setting with the use of interactive journaling, therapeutic modules, and programming that is done individually and in group settings. Inmates are evaluated on several dynamic characteristics including behavior, personal hygiene, cell compliance, and demeanor toward staff and other inmates.

VADOC's reform efforts have been nationally recognized. In 2013, the Southern Legislative Conference presented Virginia the State Transformation in Action Recognition (STAR) Award, for its diligent work in creating the Step-Down program. In 2014, the General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 184, "*commending the Virginia Department of Corrections for its outstanding leadership and dedication to public safety in administering the Step-Down program.*"³ In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice, in its *Report and Recommendations Concerning the Use of Restrictive Housing*,⁴ highlighted five jurisdictions that have undertaken particularly significant reforms in recent years, featuring Red Onion State Prison. Virginia has

¹ HB1642 (<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+CHAP0453>), patroned by Delegates Hope, Carroll Foy, Carter, Guzman, Keam, Kory, Krizek, Levine, Lopez, Price, Sullivan, and Thomas, and SB1777 (<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+CHAP0516>), patroned by Senators Saslaw and Ebbin, set forth the information to be contained this report.

² <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title53.1/chapter2/section53.1-39.1/>.

³ SJ 184 (<http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?141+ful+SJ184ER>) patroned by Senator Ebbin and Delegate Hope.

⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/archives/dag/report-and-recommendations-concerning-use-restrictive-housing>.



served as a model to over a dozen different states that have toured, observed, and applied aspects of the step-down operations in their own jurisdictions.

In 2016, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera)—in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)—selected Virginia as one of five new states to join the Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative. Vera assisted VADOC with its reform efforts, provided recommendations, and developed a partnership of learning from cultural reform. The Vera Institute of Justice report highlighted “Great Successes” of Virginia’s Restrictive Housing Reforms and offered support for future initiatives.

Virginia’s efforts have continued with several progressive changes. In April 2016, VADOC began a Restrictive Housing pilot program in four medium security level institutions based upon the success of using behavior as a primary metric for progression into general population. These sites phased out the use of static disciplinary convictions to determine progress and began considering behavior, compliance, rapport, and other dynamic factors to evaluate the inmate’s progression. By November 2018, the disciplinary model was entirely phased out and the behavior-based Restrictive Housing program was successfully expanded to all facilities.

VADOC continued its efforts to reduce the use of Restrictive Housing through the creation of diversion programs geared toward special populations:

- Steps to Achieve Reintegration (STAR) – for inmates with an unspecified fear of returning to traditional general population. Participants are placed in STAR pods where they gradually reintegrate into controlled movement, programming, and recreation.
- The Secure Diversionary Treatment Program (SDTP) – for inmates with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI). SDTP diverts inmates with an SMI from RHU into a graduated behavior management program. In the summer of 2021, VADOC was again honored with a STAR award by the Southern Legislative Conference for SDTP.
- Shared Allied Management (SAM) program – for inmates who have unique medical, mental health, or other vulnerabilities, making an assignment to traditional general population difficult. Further details about the SAM program can be found on page 6 of this report.

From 2019 to 2020, VADOC began to offer three and then four hours of meaningful out-of-cell time to all inmates in the Restrictive Housing program, using a combination of structured and unstructured activities. To facilitate this initiative, all medium security facilities and higher added an Interactive Program Aide position to coordinate and deliver these programs. Program aides work with inmates individually and in small group settings to provide pro-social activities, including interactive journaling, cognitive simulation, art activities, reading, education, and guided group discussion.

The past decade has brought several initiatives to VADOC that are aligned with the goal of managing behavior, promoting accountability, targeted programming interventions, and creating



responsible and safe pathways into general population. Ultimately, these programs foster long-term public safety for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Adoption of Restorative Housing

Code of Virginia (COV) § 53.1-39.1 requires VADOC's Restrictive Housing program, at a minimum, to adhere to the standards adopted by its accrediting body, the American Correctional Association (ACA). By January 2020, the agency's program had evolved beyond the parameters set by ACA. Specifically, ACA defines Restrictive Housing as an assignment where the inmate is separated from general population and confined to a cell for at least 22 hours per day for the safe and secure operation of the facility. In practice, the end of Restrictive Housing (as defined by ACA) took place in January 2020, when all inmates, regardless of security status, were afforded at least four hours of out-of-cell time per day.

VADOC determined that its Restrictive Housing policy should be redefined as a response to its reform efforts to better reflect agency practice, and due to the impact on accreditation. To that end, on August 1, 2021, VADOC formally adopted a Restorative Housing program for all inmates who require enhanced security and programming opportunities. The Restorative Housing program is characterized by its emphasis on behavior management, personal inmate accountability, meaningful out-of-cell time for programming, and pathways to transition inmates safely into traditional general population.

VADOC's Restorative Housing program was the subject of legislation during the 2023 General Assembly Session. HB2487⁵, *Restorative housing; restrictions on use*, would codify the Restorative Housing program and set a set standard of correctional management for the Commonwealth. HB2587 was enrolled on March 13, 2023, and was adopted into the Code of Virginia, § 53.1-39.2, effective July 1, 2023.⁶

Changes in Total VADOC Population

Since the first Annual Report, the Average Daily Population in VADOC has decreased 24%, from 29,994 at the end of FY2019⁷ to 22,850 by the end of FY2025. This decrease was due to a combination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of Enhanced Earned Sentence Credits effective July 1, 2022, and applied retroactively. As a result, the proportion of the VADOC inmate population with a violent Most Serious Offense (MSO) increased from 63% to 73% between FY2019 and FY2025. Conversely, the proportion of inmates with property/public order MSO decreased from 22% to 12%, and drug related MSO decreased from 16% to 14% between the same time period.⁸

⁵ HB2487 (<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=231&typ=bil&val=hb2487>) patroned by Delegates Davis, Hope, Scott, and Wilt.

⁶ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title53.1/chapter2/section53.1-39.2/>.

⁷ The Reduction of Restrictive Housing in the Virginia Department of Corrections, FY2024 Report.

⁸ VADOC Research Unit, September 5, 2025.



The shift toward more violent offenses and less property or drug offenses as inmates enter the VADOC system has resulted in a greater concentration of inmates classified to high-security level facilities upon intake. The impact this shift has on the Restorative Housing program is explained in the following sections of this report.

FY2025 Restorative Housing Program Summary

Virginia Code§ 53.1-39.2 establishes four specific referral pathways into the Restorative Housing (RHU) program:

1. An inmate makes a request to be placed in Restorative Housing with informed voluntary consent.
2. An inmate needs such confinement for their own protection.
3. There is a need to prevent an imminent threat of physical harm to the inmate or another person.
4. An inmate's behavior threatens the orderly operation of the facility.

The Code requires that inmates referred to the Restorative Housing program by their own request or for protection receive similar opportunities for activities, movement, and social interaction as provided in general population, considering their safety and the safety of others. Thus, VADOC created a new management status within the program for this alternative general population ("Alt-GP") requirement. Inmates referred into the program for their behavior continue to be managed under the Restorative Housing management status. These statuses are differentiated internally by movement and privileges while living in Restorative Housing Units. Further details about management statuses and operational practices within the units can be found by reviewing OP841.4, *Restorative Housing Units*, at the end of this report or online.⁹

Regardless of their management status, all inmates referred to the Restorative Housing program are offered a minimum of four hours of meaningful out-of-cell time, mandated by Code to include programmatic interventions or other congregate activities aimed at promoting personal development or addressing underlying causes of problematic behavior to include recreation. Recreation should be provided in a congregate setting unless there is a significant or unreasonable risk to the safety and security of the inmates, staff, or the facility.

In addition, all inmates referred to the Restorative Housing program in any management status work with a multi-disciplinary team to develop a transitional action plan into general population. This plan is updated weekly and approved by the facility unit head. Plans include actions needed to transition the inmates out of the program as soon as possible and a review of any less restrictive housing options available.

⁹ <https://www.vadoc.virginia.gov/general-public/operating-procedures/>.



Restorative Housing Management Status

Starting on July 1, 2024, this cohort includes only inmates referred into the program after exhibiting violent, threatening, and disruptive behavior. Prior to FY2024, inmates who requested placement in RHU or required placement for protection were included in the overall program data reported by the agency. This split should be recognized when drawing comparisons from prior years. During FY2025, 5,340 inmates were referred to RHU management status, and 5,286 were released from that status. Forty inmates were released from RHU status directly to the community, one of which was assigned to the ROSP Step-Down program.

There were 416 inmates in RHU status on June 30, 2025, comprising 1.8% of VADOC's Average Daily Population (ADP) of 22,850. This is similar to the 1.7% figure reported at the end of FY2024.

Demographically, 65% of the inmates were Black, and 34% were White. Overall, 54% of the VADOC population is Black, and 45% are White.¹⁰ On average, the Restorative Housing status participants were 30-34 years old. Of the participants in the Restorative Housing program, 44% had no history or current evidence of mental health impairment. Fifty-six percent had either minimal or mild mental health impairment, and 1% were diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness.

Inmates from all security levels in VADOC were referred into RHU status due to their behavior. In FY2025, 21% of referrals into RHU status came from low or moderate security, compared to 46% in FY2024—a decrease of 25%. The majority (78%) of referrals into RHU status came from medium, close, maximum custody, Special, and Level 6, compared to only 54% in FY2024—an increase of 19%. The remaining 1% came from a population of protective custody or from inmates who had not yet been classified. This shift in referrals follows the overall agency trend toward higher-security classification.

A shift toward higher-security needs within the agency is also represented by an increase in serious disciplinary convictions for inmates referred into the program for their behavior. Referrals are not based on discipline charges, but the data indicate inmates are coming into the RHU program with a more serious disciplinary history than in prior years. On average, the inmates referred into Restorative Housing status for their behavior had seven convictions for serious disciplinary offenses prior to their placement. On average, inmates had 10 convictions for less serious disciplinary offenses.

The existence of a higher-security cohort referred to RHU for their behavior also has an impact on the duration of time spent in the program. Inmates progress through the program based on their behavior, which is documented weekly with feedback from a multi-disciplinary team of facility staff. The mean length of stay for inmates released from RHU status during FY2025 was 30.8 days, an increase of 36% from the average of 22.7 days in FY2024. The impact of having a concentration of RHU status inmates at higher-security levels is that their case history is more extensive, and they require more security controls upon release. Developing a transition plan into

¹⁰ Management Information Summary Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2024



general population takes additional consideration, assessments, planning, and often transfers to a new high-security location.

More detailed information about the Restorative Housing status population can be found in the tables beginning on page 10 of this report.

Alternative General Population Management Status

Inmates managed under an alternative general population (“Alt-GP”) status are a part of the Restorative Housing program, but their referral is generated by the inmate’s own request, or by the facility for protection. Per COV § 53.1-39.2, these inmates live in an RHU building and are managed under general population conditions. Alt-GP is considered a temporary management status, and all inmates are engaged in developing a transitional action plan toward a release to traditional general population. All inmates referred to this status are required by Code to be reviewed for Protective Custody.

During FY2025, 1,533 inmates were referred to Alt-GP status, and 1,509 were released from that status. Sixty-four inmates were released from Alt-GP status directly to the community. There were 125 inmates in Alt-GP status on June 30, 2025, comprising 0.5% of VADOC’s Average Daily Population (ADP) of 22,850. Demographically, 52% of the inmates were Black, and 47% were White. On average, the participants were 35-39 years old. Thirty-nine percent of inmates on Alt-GP status had no history or current evidence of mental health impairment. Fifty-six percent had either minimal or mild mental health impairment, and 3% were diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness. Two percent of the population did not have a mental health code reported.

Inmates from all security levels have been referred into Alt-GP status—59% from low or medium security facilities, and 38% from close or maximum custody. The remaining 5% came from inmates assigned to protective custody or who had not yet been classified. This data highlights a different picture from the inmates in RHU management status, as this cohort is more concentrated in lower security levels than inmates referred into the program for their violent or disruptive behavior. The mean length of stay for inmates transitioning out of Alt-GP status during FY2025 was 21.5 days. The additional review for Protective Custody, paired with a significant number of inmates that refuse to leave the RHU program, impact the length of stay.

More detailed information about the Alt-GP status population can be found in the tables beginning on page 10 of this report.

Red Onion Step-Down Program

The Red Onion Step-Down Program was designed for two specific types of inmates: (1) those who have a history that indicates the willingness to carry out intentional, serious, or deadly harm; have a high escape risk; and/or have high profile crimes and/or significant media attention and may be targets of other inmates; and (2) those who have frequently recurring disciplinary violations; have a history of fighting with staff or inmates or violent resistance toward a staff intervention, but without the intent to invoke serious harm or the intent to kill; and/or



intentionally commit disciplinary violations with the goal of remaining in Restorative Housing. The first type of inmate is assigned to the Intensive Management (IM) pathway, while the second type of inmate is assigned to the Special Management (SM) pathway.

There were 126 inmates in the Red Onion Step-Down Program on June 30, 2025, a 29% increase from FY2024 (n=98). This cohort represents 0.4% of VADOC's average daily population of 22,850. This increase follows the overall trend within the agency over the past year with increases in serious incidents and a higher concentration of inmates living in maximum security locations. Demographically, 64% of the inmates were Black, and 33% were White. On average, the participants were 30-34 years old. Eighty-four percent had minimal or mild mental health impairment. There were no inmates diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness in the ROSP Step-Down program.

Inmates in the Red Onion Step-Down Program on June 30, 2025, were all assigned to security level "S."¹¹ On average, the inmates in the program had 14 convictions for serious disciplinary offenses, and an average of 15 convictions for less serious disciplinary offenses prior to their placement into the program. This data represents an 8% increase for serious disciplinary convictions, and a 16% decrease for minor disciplinary convictions from FY2024. Inmates released from the Red Onion Step-Down Program during FY2025 had a median length of stay of 8.6 months, a 15% increase from FY2024 (7.5 months).

More detailed information about the Red Onion Step-Down Program can be found in the tables beginning on page 10 of this report.

Restorative Housing and The Virginia Model

The Virginia Model is not just a new program; it's a new philosophy. It is built on two clear beliefs:

1. Incarcerated individuals have the ability to make meaningful choices.
2. Behavior should drive opportunity positively and consistently.

The model pairs incentives for good behavior with swift, fair consequences for rule violations, fostering accountability, growth, and safety for all. This approach is not about lowering expectations; it's about raising the bar for those who want to change.

With the opening of the first Virginia Model facility at Lawrenceville Correctional Center, the Department was able to close the restorative housing unit at that facility. In September 2025, the Virginia Model expanded to three more facilities: Buckingham Correctional Center, Dillwyn Correctional Center, and the S1 Cluster of Greenville Correctional Center. With the launch of The Virginia Model at those facilities, the Department was able to close the restorative housing units at Buckingham and Dillwyn.

¹¹ Inmates assigned to security level "S," designated as VADOCs highest level of classification, are considered to be in long-term Restorative Housing. Inmates work their way out of security level "S" to level 6 through an incentivized step-down process, with enhanced conditions of confinement, accountability, and cognitive behavioral programming.



Restorative Housing Unit Audits

In 2023, the Virginia Department of Corrections established an audit process for the Restorative Housing Program. The process was designed to provide an additional level of review with the implementation of new procedures and requirements under the Code of Virginia.

Small internal teams, coordinated by staff in the Restorative & Diversionary Housing Unit, are deployed to all facilities that operate a Restorative Housing Unit. The teams review a random selection of inmates assigned to restorative housing, meet with staff, and tour areas of the facility. The audit includes a review of RHU folders, documentation, programs, and other areas related to RHU procedures and requirements under the Code of Virginia.

Results of each audit are shared with the facility and regional and senior leadership. Audits are conducted on a biannual basis.

FY2024 Shared Allied Management Summary

The Shared Allied Management (SAM) program aims to promote safety and stability within institutions, while reducing the cycling of certain populations into and out of the Restorative Housing program. The SAM Unit population is composed of three distinct groups of inmates, which VADOC identifies as requiring more intense case management:

- **Mental Health Population:** mentally ill or seriously mentally ill (SMI) individuals who are at a greater risk to cycle through Restorative Housing and/or licensed mental health pods for disruptive behavior related to their mental health diagnoses and symptoms.
- **Medical Population:** medically infirm individuals requiring intermittent medical attention but not requiring placement in the infirmary; or
- **Vulnerable Population:** individuals who are at greater risk for victimization or being bullied in general population due to characteristics such as a cognitive challenge, age (seniors and youthful), small in stature, or timid personality.

SAM Units better address inmate needs and reduces high demands on security, mental health staff, and medical staff, while keeping the inmates in a general population setting. The SAM Unit program provides a continuum of services to assist in planning for the inmates' release and successful transition into society. Within this modified therapeutic community, inmates experience unique programs such as Distress Tolerance Skills Group, which includes Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Thinking for a Change, and many other treatment and mental health programs offered by the VADOC. SAM Unit inmates also participate in programs and activities that review topics such as crisis intervention, anger management, and emotional regulation skills. The goal is to create therapeutic environments for inmates with similar characteristics to encourage prosocial behaviors and interactions amongst others.

Several SAM Units across the Commonwealth participate in Community Outreach programs, which allow the inmates who are currently assigned to the unit to give back to the community.



Three notable outreach programs are Dare to Care and U.P.L.I.F.T (Understanding the Potential Lasting Impacts through Finger Knitting Therapy) at Pocahontas State Correctional Center (PSCC), and the Pillow Project at Green Rock Correctional Center (GROC). U.P.L.I.F.T involves inmates making finger-knitting lap blankets and hats and donating them to local nursing homes and hospitals. Dare to Care is an outreach program developed by SAM inmates at PSCC. It involves inmates donating their commissary to local social services, homeless shelters, and food banks. Dare to Care is completely voluntary and commissary is collected at time of delivery. Inmates choose what they want donated, and there is no minimum amount required. VADOC is very supportive and proud of the community outreach programs in which the SAM Units are participating.

There were 317 inmates in a SAM Unit on June 30, 2025, a decrease of 9% from FY2024. Demographically, 38% of the inmates were Black, and 61% were White. On average, the inmates were 35-39 years old. Sixty-five percent of the participants had either minimal or mild mental health impairment, while 20% had a diagnosis of Serious Mental Illness or moderate impairment.

With the adoption of The Virginia Model at Buckingham Correctional Center (BKCC), the SAM Unit at this facility was closed. All inmates have been transferred to a SAM Unit that corresponds with their security level. Those who wished to participate in The Virginia Model were screened, and if accepted, were removed from the SAM Unit on a voluntary basis and remained at BKCC.

More detailed information about the SAM participants can be found in the tables beginning on page 10 of this report. Copies of VADOC procedures related to the Restorative Housing program, as well as any changes made during FY2025, begin on page 12 of this report.

Conclusion

The Virginia Department of Corrections has embarked on a journey to significantly reform and improve the practice of segregation and restrictive housing, ultimately becoming a national leader in adopting a vision of restorative housing. This vision was enshrined by the passage of legislation and adoption of the program into the Code of Virginia.

Reentry and long-term public safety remain the cornerstone of the agency, anchored in data-driven decision making and evidence-based practices. The Restorative Housing program continues to evolve under those principles and remains a critical element of safety and security for inmates and staff in the Virginia Department of Corrections.