



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

NELSON SMITH
COMMISSIONER

DEPARTMENT OF
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
Post Office Box 1797
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1797

Telephone (804) 786-3921
Fax (804) 371-6638
www.dbhds.virginia.gov

January 16, 2026

To: The Honorable Glenn A. Youngkin, Governor of Virginia
The Honorable Louise L. Lucas, Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations
The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair, House Appropriations

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

Re: Item 296 E, 2025 Appropriation Act

Item 296 E. of Chapter 725 of the 2025 Acts of Assembly ("Appropriation Act") directs the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to implement alternative transportation ("AT") and custody ("AC") programs for adults and children under an emergency custody order, temporary detention order, or involuntary commitment order. The language states:

E.1. Out of this appropriation, \$14,522,552 the first year and \$18,673,707 the second year from the general fund shall be provided for alternative transportation for adults and children under a temporary detention order or involuntary commitment order and for a program of alternative custody for individuals under an emergency custody order, temporary detention order, or involuntary commitment order who are awaiting evaluation or transport to an inpatient bed. The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, in consultation with local law enforcement, community services boards, and other stakeholders as appropriate, shall implement a plan to provide alternative custody options for individuals under temporary detention orders or involuntary commitment orders to reduce the length of time law enforcement resources are involved and improve patient outcomes. The department may contract with private contractors, enter into agreements with local law enforcement organizations, contract with Community Services Boards, or use other methods as necessary to implement the program. The department shall report to the Governor and Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees on the effectiveness and outcomes of the program funding by October 1 of each year.

2. Out of the amounts in E.1., up to \$10,089,107 the second year from the general fund is provided for contracts with private hospitals or other qualified agencies to hire Special Conservators of the Peace, as defined in §§ 19.2-12 through 19.2-25, Code of Virginia, to provide capacity for emergency departments to maintain custody of individuals under emergency custody orders and/or temporary detention orders until the individual is ready for transport to the bed of temporary detention or released. The department shall prioritize this funding to fund contracts that provide coverage for all of Region Three and Region One and, to the extent that any funding is available after needs are met in Regions Three and One, the department may expand the program into Region Five. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, such contracts shall be exempt from competition as otherwise required by the Virginia Public Procurement Act, §§ 2.2-4300 through 2.2-4377, Code of Virginia.

In accordance with this Item, please find enclosed the report for alternative transportation and custody programs for activities during Fiscal Year 2025. Staff are available should you wish to discuss this request.

Cc: Janet V. Kelly, Secretary, Health and Human Resources



Alternative Transportation and Custody Report

(Item 296 E, 2025 Appropriation Act)

October 1, 2025

DBHDS Vision: A Life of Possibilities for All Virginians

1220 BANK STREET • P.O. BOX 1797 • RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218-1797
PHONE: (804) 786-3921 • FAX: (804) 371-6638 • WEB SITE: WWW.DBHDS.VIRGINIA.GOV

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
Procurement/Contracting.....	4
Outcomes.....	5
Steadfast Security	6
Hospital Contracts for ECO Custody and TDO Transport Options.....	7
Continued Build-Out and New Solutions.....	7
Conclusion.....	8

Executive Summary

This report summarizes DBHDS' activities from July of 2024 through June of 2025 to advance options for alternative transportation and custody of individuals being detained under an emergency custody order (ECO), a temporary detention order (TDO), and/or involuntary commitment to a state facility with continuing custody and transportation needs prior to admission. Primary activities during this period focused on procuring new vendors with an enhanced scope of work, based on successful models of service implemented in the previous year.

Governor Youngkin's *Right Help, Right Now* initiatives have provided a unique opportunity for collaboration throughout DBHDS to improve, enhance and create new supports along the continuum of crisis care. Transportation and custody options other than law enforcement during crisis care will be an ongoing need as the system matures and new services are in place. This report outlines the current focus of need and results of the efforts to improve transportation and custody services over the last year and reduce the law enforcement burden for these duties. In addition, it outlines plans for statewide expansion.

Background

Training Requirements for all DBHDS Contractors for Custody and Transportation

DBHDS requires that staff maintaining custody and providing transportation meet and maintain all requirements for training as follows:

- Meet all Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) requirements to register as a Special Conservator of the Peace (SCOP)
- Ensure SCOPs are officially appointed by their local Circuit Court to the location(s) in which they will provide services
- Training in verbal de-escalation techniques
- Training in trauma-informed care
- CPR and First Aid certification
- HIPAA regulations
- DBHDS REACH Team training in working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Complete the 40-hour CIT training in the locality in which they are serving within 6 months of hire

Code Requirements for Transfer of Custody

The Code of Virginia defines the circumstances under which a law enforcement officer may transfer custody to an alternative provider. There are differences in how these circumstances are defined for ECO (§37.2-808) and the TDO (§37.2-809). Under an ECO, a facility may maintain custody under required conditions, however this language does not appear in the Code section for TDOs. The only means for a transfer of custody to an alternative provider under the TDO is via an alternative transportation order (§37.2-810). This requires approval by a magistrate.

Because of these distinctions, DBHDS has worked closely with contractors to ensure that the Code requirements are met for each phase of custody and transport.

Procurement/Contracting:

TDO Custody and Transportation

Options for person-centered, trauma-informed and secure custody and transportation for individuals under a TDO began in October of 2019 under a contract between DBHDS and G4S Security Solutions (“G4S”). These services were available to adults and children statewide by 2021. G4S was acquired by Allied Universal (“Allied”) in a corporate buyout late in 2021, and the terms of the original contract transferred to Allied through this buyout. After initial success with G4S during the first year of the buildout, Allied was not able to continue the momentum or reach benchmark levels of service for TDO transports. A pilot project was conducted within the catchment areas of five CSBs within Region 1 in which Allied implemented the use of restraint options to be able to transport more highly acute individuals. The pilot did not achieve the contractual requirement of transporting 50 percent of TDOs in that area. This contract was set to expire on March 31, 2025, and in accordance with the Virginia Public Procurement Act, DBHDS issued a new Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2024 with proposals due July 25, 2024. DBHDS received only 4 proposals in response to the RFP. Of the proposals, the selection committee deemed two as qualified to potentially provide the services. After robust negotiations, DBHDS ultimately decided to accept a proposal from Steadfast Security and allowed the Allied Universal contract to expire.

Allied Universal ceased statewide operations on March 16, 2025, prior to the contract expiration date. DBHDS informed stakeholders of this change ahead of time. While these services did not fulfill their contracted service levels, many localities in which the service was available greatly appreciated the relief it brought and felt its loss when the contract expired.

Via an emergency contract in southwest Virginia for the catchment areas of three CSBs, Steadfast Security produced remarkable results within the limited duration of the contract. In response to the RFP, Steadfast proposed to expand their successful model to all 10 Region 3 CSBs by September of 2025 with an option to expand statewide as budget and resources allowed. The new contract was signed with Steadfast in March of 2025.

ECO Custody and TDO Custody and Transportation

In addition to the model for TDO custody and transportation provided by Steadfast, DBHDS has been working with Valley Health System’s (“Valley Health”) Winchester Medical Center on another model of custody and transportation. DBHDS contracted with Valley Health in May of 2025 to hire a specialized work force trained in de-escalation, Crisis Intervention Training, CPR and First Aid, use of restraints, and credentialed as Special Conservators of the Peace (SCOPs) appointed to their facility. This workforce was used to take custody of individuals under an ECO and maintain custody and provide transportation for individuals under a TDO with an alternative transportation order. Valley Health will begin providing this service in August of 2025 on a limited, 8-hour per day basis. They anticipate capacity to expand to 24/7 service by December 2025.

Outcomes

Allied Universal

Allied Universal provided TDO transportation statewide until the end of their contract in March of 2025. The following table provides the number of completed transports compared to the total TDOs executed by region. The percentages in the last column on the right represent the percentage of TDOs transported by Allied by month.

2024-2025	Region 1 TDOs	Region 2 TDOs	Region 3 TDOs	Region 4 TDOs	Region 5 TDOs	TOTAL TDOs	Allied AT Transports	Percentage of AT Transports
July	336	364	360	277	457	1794	158	8.81%
August	329	382	394	293	426	1824	163	8.94%
September	321	342	364	290	407	1724	176	10.21%
October	332	378	355	297	416	1778	175	9.84%
November	321	352	313	275	411	1672	156	9.33%
December	318	332	316	285	404	1655	156	9.43%
January	308	370	359	274	395	1,706	148	8.68%
February	320	322	311	244	297	1494	118	7.90%
March	280	415	385	327	368	1775	55	3.10%

The contract with Allied required them to have capacity to transport 50 percent of statewide TDOs. After five years, they were not able to reach this benchmark due to multiple factors including staffing levels, patient acuity, the ability to flex resources statewide to meet demand, and long response times in which law enforcement would choose to do the transport because it was faster for them to do so.

While unable to meet benchmarks, DBHDS recognizes the challenges in setting up a new and complicated service for such a large statewide geographic area. By tracking data and trends, DBHDS has been able to learn from this initial iteration of the program and restructure based on lessons learned over the last 5-year evolution of these services. Over the life of the contract with Allied, they transported 8,957 individuals safely to their facility of detention.

Steadfast Security

Emergency Contract

DBHDS was in contract with Steadfast Security for the initial pilot of alternative transportation services in 2015. DBHDS entered into an emergency contract with them again in 2024 to address custody and transport needs for three CSBs in Region 3 that would be impacted by bed closures at Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute due to repairs to its HVAC system. During this 15-month emergency contract, Steadfast produced remarkable results including:

- 86 percent of all requests (569 of 663) for service between April 2024 and March 2025 were completed.
- The average response time after request was 54 minutes.
- The average transport was 3 hours.
- 54 percent of requests required custody prior to transport.
- The average time in custody prior to transport was 14 hours.

- 59 percent of those for whom custody was maintained were placed in a private facility instead of a state facility bed.
- Of all individuals served, including those who were transport-only requests, 77 percent were placed at a private facility.
- Steadfast travelled 178,426 miles transporting individuals in their custody.
- Services saved law enforcement 6,448 hours of time.
- Only 11 percent of individuals in custody required restraint (use of handcuffs) due to risk of elopement or combativeness.

New Steadfast Contract

As noted previously, Steadfast also submitted a proposal in response to the new RFP for statewide services, after expiration of the Allied contract, and was awarded the contract. Steadfast is a small, woman-owned company and will need time to develop the infrastructure to bring its successful operations to scale statewide. Capacity to expand beyond Regions 1 and 3 will also require additional budget resources.

Since the new contract was signed in March of 2025, Steadfast has already completed expansion to all 10 CSBs in Region 3, and DBHDS is in the process of approving terms for expansion into Region 1 with an anticipated completion of this expansion by the end of June of 2026. Results since March include

- 535 custody and transport events completed, saving law enforcement 5,662 hours of custody and transport time.
- Average response time is 74 minutes.
- Traveled over 195,610 miles
- Average length of transport is 3 hours.
- Average length of custody maintained is 18.5 hours.
- Restraints used with 11 percent of individuals in custody or during transport with ability to take custody of and transport individuals with high levels of acuity of symptoms, aggression or elopement risk
- 47 percent of individuals who were the subject of a civil TDO in Region 3 were maintained in custody and transported by Steadfast in June of 2025.

Hospital Contracts for ECO Custody and TDO Transport Options

In addition to addressing the needs for custody and transportation during the period of temporary detention, DBHDS is looking at hospitals that receive a high volume of individuals under ECOs from law enforcement in their emergency rooms. Law enforcement is mandated to maintain custody for this 8-hour period while CSB-certified pre-screeners determine whether the individual will need to be placed under a TDO or if there are other options for safe treatment.

DBHDS signed a contract with Valley Health System at Winchester Medical Center in May of 2025 to provide funding for the hospital to hire, train and credential security personnel as SCOPs along with completing additional training as previously outlined.

In accordance with state law, Valley Health will enter into Memoranda of Understanding (“MOUs”) with local law enforcement agencies in order for law enforcement to transfer custody

of individuals under an ECO to Valley Health. Law enforcement officers from jurisdictions that have a MOU with Valley Health can transfer custody of an individual under an ECO to Valley Health, and the Valley Health SCOP will maintain custody during the ECO period. If the individual moves to a TDO, the hospital agrees to also serve as the alternative transportation provider for the individual, and the local magistrate identifies the hospital as the alternative transportation provider in the order, the hospital staff can continue to maintain custody and provide transport to the facility of detention as the Code of Virginia allows. Valley Health will begin providing this service in August of 2025 with capacity to take transfers of custody 24/7 by December. At the time of this report, Valley Health has MOUs with four law enforcement agencies and will continue to seek to enter into additional agreements over time.

DBDHS will be targeting additional willing hospitals for implementation of this model throughout the next fiscal year. Since solutions in Regions 1 and 3 are prioritized in the appropriations language, DBHDS will be focusing on hospitals in the Fredericksburg and Charlottesville areas next with expansion into Region 5 being the next highest area of need.

Continued Build-out and New Solutions

As crisis receiving centers continue to be built throughout Virginia, DBHDS is also looking at options for custody and transport across the continuum of crisis care. There are opportunities to collaborate with localities with Crisis Intervention Team Assessment Centers (CITAC). These CITACs are typically staffed with off-duty law enforcement, and many localities struggle to fill all of their shifts due to ongoing law enforcement staffing shortages. This decreases the ability to transfer custody during the ECO period in many localities. DBHDS is assessing which CITACs have the best transfer rates and which may need additional resources to fully staff during operating hours. Some of the alternative transportation/alternative custody funds may be able to assist with personnel credentialed as SCOPs as described above in CITACs to more fully realize their potential to relieve law enforcement of custody obligations.

DBHDS has also initiated conversations with the Department of Medical Assistance Services to explore additional funding options for emergency behavioral health transportation as a means to expand resources for these programs.

Conclusion

Fiscal year 2025 has been a year of transition for the alternative custody and transportation programs. This is reflected in the change of vendors and the development on new models of operation. Unspent funds during FY 2025 are a reflection of these changes while the old program was taken down and the new contracts were negotiated. However, within the few months of operation, Steadfast is already producing positive results and providing significant relief to law enforcement agencies in Region 3. An emergency services manager in Region 3 wrote the following:

“Steadfast has been stellar in their roll out to my area, meeting with members of our leadership at the beginning to get to know us, understand the local needs and provide us with a face to the name behind those in charge. As the program launched, we ran into

obstacles at times but they were easily worked through with clear communication between my team and their leadership. They are open to feedback and want to know ways to improve streamlining processes. My team has given me feedback on their dispatch center and how easy it has been to work with them. This program has been nothing short of incredible for my team, our partner agencies (including hospital systems and law enforcement) as well as improve client experience during some of the hardest times in their lives.”

The partnership with Valley Health is new, and DBHDS looks forward to collecting data to demonstrate impacts on time saved for law enforcement and positive patient experiences as this program begins in August.

To expand statewide, DBHDS will require additional funding in FY 2027 and 2028. Over and 12 months of data and invoicing will be used to support accurate budget projections. DBHDS will also have a better understanding of the number of hospitals or other partners willing to contract with the agency to fund SCOPs in emergency rooms or other crisis assessment locations. By understanding local needs and resources and tailoring one or both of these solutions to the locality, DBHDS believes we can best meet the needs for custody and transport for individuals in crisis across the Commonwealth.