



Virginia Civilian Deaths in Custody in 2025

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
Criminal Justice Research Center

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Preface

Virginia House Bill 611 of the 2024 legislative session amended the *Code of Virginia* (COV) to require the collection and reporting of the deaths of civilians in the custody of Virginia law enforcement agencies and correctional facilities to reduce the number of such deaths. COV § 9.1-192.1 mandates that every law enforcement agency and state or juvenile correctional facility shall report to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), and every local or regional adult correctional facility shall report to the State Board of Local and Regional Jails (BLRJ), the death of any person who is:

1. Detained,
2. Under arrest or in the process of being arrested,
3. En route to be incarcerated, or incarcerated,
4. Or otherwise in the custody of such law enforcement agency or correctional facility.

COV § 9.1-192.1 further mandates that DCJS and BLRJ analyze the data submitted to them to determine “the means by which such information can be used to reduce the number of deaths” in custody, and report annually on such findings by July 1st each year.

The *Virginia Civilian Deaths in Custody in 2025* report is the second such report from DCJS.

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Executive Summary

The data collected by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the Board of Local and Regional Jails (BLRJ) covers 216 civilian deaths in custody that were applicable under the standards set forth in the *Code of Virginia* (COV) § 9.1-192.1 in calendar year 2025.

This report reviews and analyzes the 158 civilian deaths that occurred in the custody of Virginia law enforcement agencies and state adult correctional facilities (prisons) that were reported to DCJS and occurred during the period of January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. Readers who want to review the 58 cases that happened in the custody of Virginia's local or regional jails should reference the *Board of Local and Regional Jails Calendar Year 2025 Annual Report of Jail Death Reviews* found on that agency's website.

This report analyzes the data submitted to DCJS for 2025, focusing on the demographics of decedents and how those individuals died. The analysis covers decedent gender, race, ethnicity, age, and manner of death. DCJS found that male (96%) and Black (37%) decedents were overrepresented in the data relative to the general population (49% and 20% of the general population, respectively). The overrepresentation of men and Black decedents is likely due to their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system more broadly. The data also showed that persons who died in prison were more likely to die of natural causes, whereas those who died in law enforcement custody were more likely to die due to officer use of force.

Lastly, this report presents a set of recommendations aimed at reducing the number of civilian deaths in custody, as required by COV § 9.1-192.1. These recommendations were prepared by a working group of subject matter experts that met in quarter 1 of 2026. DCJS improved the process by separating the recommendations group for law enforcement cases and incarceration cases. The groups reviewed the deaths in custody data used in this report to formulate recommendations for how to reduce the number of civilian deaths in custody. Under the advice of this group, DCJS recommends the following:

Law Enforcement Deaths in Custody:

- Add authority to DCJS for additional data collection
- Amend the definition of "in custody"
- Add requirement for agencies to update information
- Enhance pursuit policies for high-risk pursuits
- Incorporate mental health de-escalation protocols in armed encounters
- Scenario-specific use-of-force decision training
- Standardize post-arrest medical screening for substance involvement

Deaths in State Prisons:

- Improve data quality
- Expand access to drug overdose services
- Expand use of peer recovery specialists
- Improve education for healthy lifestyles for inmates
- Investigate the use of biometric scanning technology
- Improve de-escalation training
- Review the use of four restraints
- Improve living conditions for long-term incarceration
- Increase staffing in facilities

Introduction

Virginia House Bill 611 of the 2024 legislative session amended the *Code of Virginia* (COV) to require the collection and reporting of the deaths of civilians in the custody of Virginia law enforcement and correctional facilities to reduce the number of such deaths. COV § 9.1-192.1 mandates that every law enforcement agency and state or juvenile correctional facility shall report to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), and every local or regional adult correctional facility shall report to the State Board of Local and Regional Jails (BLRJ), the death of any person who is:

1. Detained,
2. Under arrest or in the process of being arrested¹,
3. En route to be incarcerated, or incarcerated,
4. Or otherwise in the custody of such law enforcement agency or correctional facility².

The data collected by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Board of Local and Regional Jails pursuant to COV § 9.1-192.1 covers 216 civilian deaths in custody in calendar year 2025. Of these, this report will review and examine the 158 deaths that occurred in the custody of Virginia law enforcement agencies and state correctional facilities, and the data collection system developed to collect these data. Readers who want to review the 58 cases that happened in the custody of Virginia's local or regional jails should reference the *Board of Local and Regional Jails Calendar Year 2025 Annual Report of Jail Death Reviews* found on the agency's website.

Data Collection and Methodology

To collect the data called for in COV § 9.1-192.1, DCJS designed and implemented a data collection system in 2024, which it used to collect the data in this report. This data collection system integrates data collected directly by DCJS with data collected by the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) and the BLRJ. Each of the above agencies is responsible for collecting deaths-in-custody data from different types of reporting agencies: DCJS receives data directly from law enforcement agencies and juvenile correctional facilities³; VADOC – from adult correction facilities⁴; and BLRJ – from local and regional jails.

Readers should be aware that this data collection effort is significantly different than how DCJS collected deaths-in-custody data before 2024 (which was based on reports from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and news aggregation datasets), and as such any comparisons to the data contained in this series of reports to those from other sources such as those produced by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (before 2024) should be viewed with an appropriate level of scrutiny. It is likely that the current data collection methods report more cases than previous methods, as it is less likely for cases to go unreported with the current data reporting methodology. For more details on the data collection system DCJS uses please reference the [2024 version of this report](#).

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- ¹ The process of arrest is a term that is not defined in the *Code of Virginia*. DCJS uses guidance provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to define the process of arrest as: incidents resulting in the death of a person where there was intent by law enforcement to detain or restrain, active pursuit by law enforcement with intent to arrest or restrain, in the process of being restrained, or in restraint and/or under arrest. This also includes the death of a person who has been arrested and/or restrained and is enroute to a different facility (e.g., diversion center, holding facility, jail, or lock-up).
 - ² The Code of Virginia does not differentiate between cases of civil versus criminal detention. As such, both civil detentions (such as emergency custody orders) and criminal detentions (such as an investigative detention) would be applicable forms of detentions for a death to be reportable under the Code of Virginia.
 - ³ Virginia has one state juvenile correctional facility and multiple local and regional juvenile detention centers. DCJS collected deaths in custody data from both types of facilities. As there were no cases occurring in either facility type, this report will refer to both collectively as juvenile correctional facilities (JCFs) for brevity.
 - ⁴ According to Code of Virginia § 9.1-192.1, prisons are supposed to report data to DCJS; DCJS has agreed that data will be collected by VADOC headquarters and then submitted to DCJS.

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Since the implementation of this data collection system, DCJS continues to work to ensure that every death in custody (as defined in the COV) is collected and analyzed. DCJS checks other relevant data sources, namely data from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and Mapping Police Violence, to ensure cases do not go unreported. In the 2025 report, DCJS now includes cases that were identified in these other datasets that DCJS could confirm qualified as in-custody deaths, even if those cases were not specifically identified by a law enforcement agency. In 2025 there were six such cases. Originally the 2024 report did not count such cases (of which there were 11 in 2024), but DCJS does include them in Appendix 3 which discusses updates to the 2024 data. DCJS does not include cases identified as possible deaths in custody in other sources if DCJS could not confirm they meet the definition of in custody establish in COV § 9.1-192.1. There was one such case found for CY2025. For more information about how DCJS investigates potential cases, please reference the 2024 report.

Table 1 shows which agencies are responsible for gathering data from the four custodial agency types described in COV § 9.1-192.1. DCJS identified 216 cases of civilian deaths in custody in 2025, and this report analyzes the 158 cases that occurred in the custody of prisons and law enforcement agencies (there were no cases occurring in juvenile correctional facilities).

Table 1: Types of Agencies that Report Deaths in Custody Data, 2025

Agency Type	Number of Agencies/Facilities	Number of Deaths in Custody	Reporting Agency
Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs)	348	47	DCJS
Juvenile Correctional Facilities (JCFs)*	24	0	DCJS
State Adult Correctional Facilities (Prisons)	36	111	DOC
Local and Regional Jails	52	58	BLRJ
Total	460	216	

*This includes the state’s juvenile correctional facility and all local and regional juvenile detention centers (23).

DCJS collects data on deaths that occur in the custody of Virginia’s law enforcement agencies and juvenile correctional facilities through an online form that agencies use to report any deaths in custody, or to inform DCJS that no deaths in custody occurred⁵. DCJS collects this data every quarter. To ensure the current data collection is complete and accurate, DCJS continuously examines other available data sources, investigating any potential death in custody that did not appear in its data, and adding any cases it identifies as deaths in custody. For more information about the specifics of the DCJS data collection, please reference Appendices 1 and 2, or the 2024 report.

Analysis

Before going into the analysis from DCJS, it is important to note a few things to ensure the analysis is given the necessary context. First, this analysis only covers the 158 cases that were identified by DCJS and that DCJS could confirm were deaths that fell under the parameters set forth in COV § 9.1-192.1. This analysis does not cover the 58 cases from local and regional jails covered in the BLRJ report, nor any cases that DCJS identified in other datasets that DCJS could not confirm qualified as in-custody deaths.

Readers are also cautioned to remember that the DCJS definition of “in custody” is drawn from COV § 9.1-192.1 and may be broader than the readers’ conception of the word. Many readers may think of “in custody” as having a physical component; that it means, for example, that the decedent was “handcuffed in the back of the squad car”

⁵ Guidance from the BJA regarding reporting for the federal Deaths in Custody Report Act (DCRA) requires that reporting agencies (in this case DCJS) receive positive confirmation that custodial agencies experienced no deaths in a reporting quarter. As such, DCJS asks that reporting agencies/facilities respond to the form indicating no deaths have occurred.

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or some similar scenario. However, the definition as outlined in the COV is broader. Officers might not have physical custody of the decedent, but the case can still qualify under the COV as an in-custody death if, for example, the individual was verbally detained or was being pursued by police and in the process of an arrest.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, the deaths-in-custody data presented in this report uses a data collection system that was implemented in 2024. While this makes the data in this report comparable to the 2024 report, readers are cautioned against comparing the data in this report series against data from before 2024, or other states, without due consideration on the part of the reader. The mandate established in COV § 9.1-192.1 required a more complete method of data collection than what was used previously to meet the federal Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA) requirements. For this reason, the number of reported cases of “death in custody” (DIC) data from 2024-2025 should not be directly compared with pre-2024 data; the data collection methods differ, and any observed difference in the number of deaths in custody could be due to the different methodologies. Similarly, any observed differences between states could be due to differences in the definition of “in custody” or in how comprehensive their data collection efforts are when compared to Virginia. If a state uses a different, less stringent definition, or if its data collection scheme is more likely to miss cases, it might appear to have fewer in-custody deaths than Virginia, when in reality this could be a function of their data collection process.

These concerns do not mean it is impossible to analyze how comparatively prevalent deaths in custody in Virginia are. This report performs three forms of comparative analysis: first all analyses done in this report will compare the data in the 2024 report to the data from 2025. Second, this report will examine a longer period for prison deaths using data provided by the Virginia Department of Corrections, and third, it compares the rate of officer-involved shootings against the national and state averages found in non-government databases.

Deaths in Custody Analysis

With the above in mind, what does the data show? There were 216 deaths in custody reported to DCJS in 2025 across the four types of reporting agencies: state correctional facilities, local and regional jails, law enforcement agencies, and juvenile correctional facilities. The total number of reportable cases increased by 11 compared with 2024, roughly a 5% increase. About half (51%) of the cases, 111, occurred in state adult correctional facilities, with the remaining cases being roughly split between local and regional jails (58, 27%) and law enforcement agencies (47, 22%). No cases occurred in juvenile correctional facilities. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of cases across the agency types. Compared with 2024, the number of law enforcement cases decreased by about 22%, the number of cases occurring in Virginia’s prisons increased by about 14% and the number of cases occurring in Virginia’s local and regional jails increased by about 21%. See Table 2 to see a breakdown in the yearly changes in cases by agency type. For any further analysis regarding cases that occurred in local and regional jails in Virginia, see the Board of Local and Regional Jail’s Calendar Year 2025 Annual Report of Jail Death Reviews found on that agency’s website.

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Figure 1: Deaths in Custody, by Agency Type, 2025

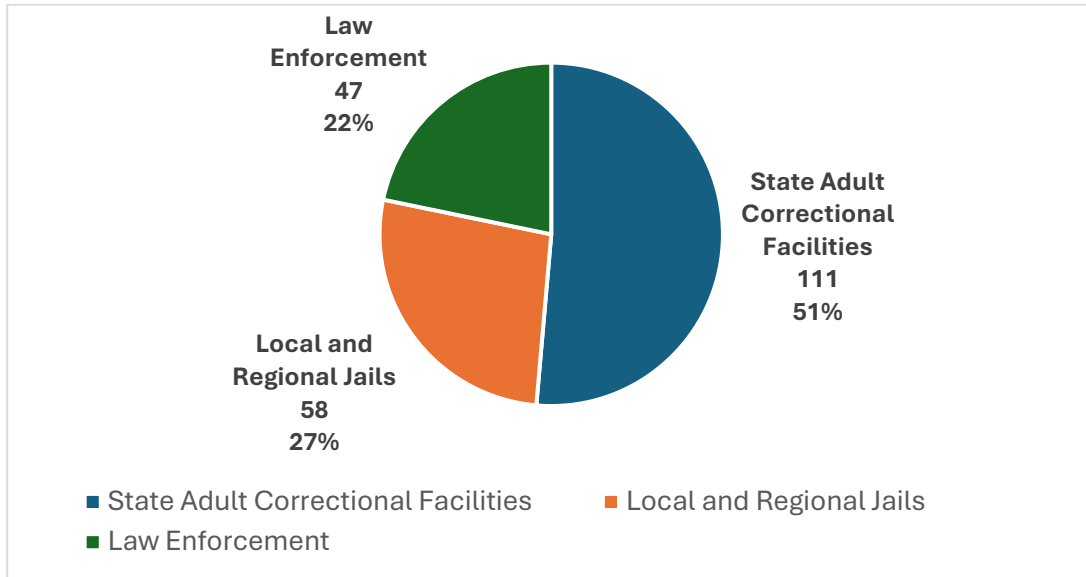


Table 2: Deaths in Custody, by Agency Type, 2024-2025

Agency Type	2024* Cases	2025 Cases	% Change
Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs)	60	47	-22%
Juvenile Correctional Facilities (JCFs)	0	0	0%
State Adult Correctional Facilities (Prisons)	97	111	14%
Local and Regional Jails	48	58	21%
Total	205	216	5%

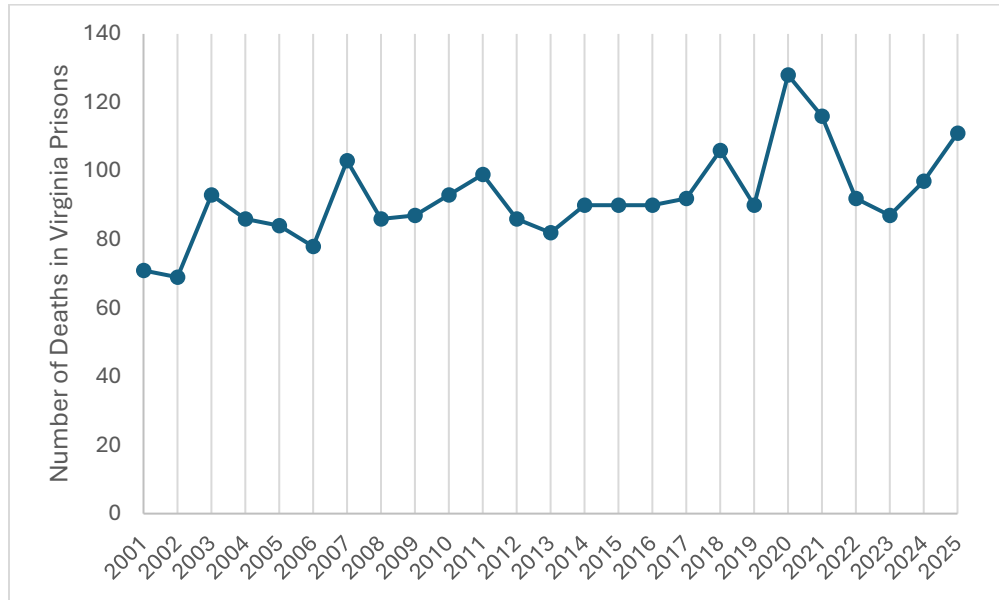
*The numbers reported here will differ from those that appear in the 2024 report as they have been updated with new information as it has become available.

Deaths in Prison Over Time

The Virginia Department of Corrections has deaths-in-custody data for deaths in Virginia’s prisons since at least 2001. Using this data, the trends for this type of death in custody can be reliably examined over a much longer period. Figure 2 shows the number of prisoners who died in Virginia correctional facilities from 2001-2025.

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Figure 2: Number of Deaths in Virginia State Prisons, 2001-2025



These data show that the average yearly number of deaths in the last 25 years has been about 92. The data shows a slight upward trend over this period: the average for the first half (2001-2012) was about 86 deaths a year, and the average for the second half (2013-2025) was about 98⁶ deaths a year. This upward trend makes sense when one considers how the aging prison population can affect mortality rates, something this report will discuss later. There is a peak in the data in 2020 and 2021 corresponding with the COVID-19 pandemic- removing these outlier years, the average number of deaths since 2001 was about 90.

When compared to the average daily population of VADOC institutions in 2025⁷, Virginia's prisons experienced about 486 deaths per 100,000 inmates. This represents a roughly 16% increase from 2024, in line with the increase in the number of incarceration cases from 2024 to 2025.

Decedent Gender

Deaths in custody decedents in 2025 were more likely to be men than women⁸. Of the 158 cases DCJS had gender data for every case; 152 (96%) were men while six (4%) were women. The gender composition of deaths in custody has not substantially changed from 2024 to 2025, men were almost all of the cases in both years. The gender composition of deaths in custody is congruent with what is known about criminal justice populations; the vast majority of the incarcerated are men⁹, and the majority of the civilians in police interactions (such as arrests)¹⁰,

⁶ If 2020 and 2021 are excluded to account for COVID-19, the average for this period was about 93.

⁷ Estimated to be about 22,800, compiled from averaging monthly reports put out by the Virginia Department of Corrections found here: vadoc.virginia.gov/general-public/population-reports. This estimate covers inmates who are the responsibility of the Department of Corrections and who are held in DOC institutions.

⁸ Data collection allowed for other gender categories, however there were no cases for anyone who was not male or female.

⁹ Sawyer, Wendy. *The Gender Divide: Table 2*. 2018. Prison Policy Initiative. www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime_table_2.html

¹⁰ *Crime in the United States: Table 42*. 2019. FBI. ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-42/table-42.xls

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traffic stops¹¹, or fatal encounters¹²) are men. Unlike the findings in the 2024 report, the gender dynamics do not vary much between the agency types covered in this report. Table 3 shows the gender breakdown by agency type.

Table 3: Deaths in Custody, by Gender and Agency Type, 2025

Gender	State Adult Correctional Facilities		Law Enforcement		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Men	107	96%	45	96%	152	96%
Women	4	4%	2	4%	6	4%
Unknown	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	111	100%	47	100%	158	100%

Decedent Race

DCJS collected data on the decedent’s race using the following categories:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black
- Middle Eastern
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other (with a text box to provide additional information)
- Unknown

Of the 158 decedents, DCJS received race data for 157 (99%). Of these 157 cases, 99 (63%) were White, 58 (37%) were Black. Like gender, the racial demographics did not differ much between agency types. The racial composition of those who died while in custody in Virginia has not changed dramatically from 2024 to 2025. Table 4 shows the number of cases for each racial group and agency type.

Table 4: Deaths in Custody, by Race and Agency Type, 2025

Race	State Adult Correctional Facilities		Law Enforcement		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black	42	38%	16	34%	58	37%
Middle Eastern	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
White	69	62%	30	64%	99	63%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unknown	0	0%	1	2%	1	<1%
Total	111	100%	47	100%	158	100%

¹¹ DCJS. 2023 Report on Analysis of Traffic Stop Data Collected Under Virginia’s Community Policing Act. 2023. www.dcls.virginia.gov/sites/dcls.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/cy23-cpa-tsreport-final.pdf

¹² Mapping Police Violence. 2025. mappingpoliceviolence.org.

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There is a disparity between the racial makeup of Virginia’s population and the racial makeup of those who died in custody during 2025. White residents make up about 68% of the Virginia population, whereas Black residents make up about 20%¹³. This means that Black decedents are overrepresented among those who died in custody: while they make up only 20% of the population, they are 37% of those who died in custody. However, this overrepresentation is likely the result of the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the criminal justice system. For incarcerated populations, Black inmates make up 54% of the population, whereas White inmates make up 45% of the population¹⁴. While the racial demographics of those who interact with law enforcement is harder to estimate, evidence suggests a similar breakdown: Black individuals make up roughly 41% of those arrested¹⁵, 30% of traffic stops¹⁶, and 23% of those killed in police shootings¹⁷. So, while Black decedents are overrepresented in the data when compared to the average Virginia population, this is likely the result of the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the criminal justice system at large.

Decedent Ethnicity

DCJS collected data on the decedent’s ethnicity using the following categories:

- Hispanic
- Not Hispanic
- Unknown

Of the 158 cases in the DCJS dataset, ethnicity data for the decedents was available in 89 (56%) cases. Of the 89 cases with ethnicity data, five decedents were listed as Hispanic, roughly 6% of the data.

To address the high amount of missing ethnicity data, DCJS performed a name matching analysis to estimate the ethnicity for those decedents for whom ethnicity data was not reported. In this analysis, DCJS compared the surnames of decedents against a Census list of the most common surnames amongst the Hispanic population in the United States¹⁸. Research has demonstrated that surnames are a good predictor of ethnicity¹⁹. It is important to note that while a surname is an effective predictor of Hispanic identity, it is not as accurate as self-identified data, or more complex imputation methods that use data not available to DCJS. As such, readers should understand that the data provided as a result of the name matching analysis are an estimation and should be considered as such.

DCJS referenced the last names for all decedents against any name on the 100 most common Spanish surnames from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Spanish Origins Surname list, sometime referred to as the Passell-Word list. This yielded no cases where the decedent’s surname was on the Census list, but who were not listed as Hispanic in the data. Other sources estimate that at least 80% of people with these surnames are Hispanic²⁰. To validate this name matching process DCJS also checked whether it would have correctly predicted the ethnicity of those who were

¹³ United States Census Bureau QuickFacts. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Virginia.” *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/PST045223.

¹⁴ Department of Corrections. “Annual Report of the Quarterly Report of Demographic, Offense and Health Information of Offenders Incarcerated in VADOC Facilities – CY2025”, <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2025/RD1032>.

¹⁵ Virginia Data Analysis & Reporting Team and Virginia State Police. *Crime in Virginia*. report, 2024, <https://vsp.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Crime-In-Virginia-2024a.pdf>.

¹⁶ DCJS. *2023 Report on Analysis of Traffic Stop Data Collected Under Virginia’s Community Policing Act*. 2023. www.dcls.virginia.gov/sites/dcls.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/cy23-cpa-tsreport-final.pdf.

¹⁷ *Mapping Police Violence*. 2025. mappingpoliceviolence.org.

¹⁸ Word, David L., Jr., et al. *Building a Spanish Surname List for the 1990’s—A New Approach to an Old Problem*. U.S. Census Bureau, Mar. 1996, www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/1996/demo/POP-twps0013.pdf.

¹⁹ Fiscella, Kevin, and Allen M. Fremont. “Use of Geocoding and Surname Analysis to Estimate Race and Ethnicity.” *Health Services Research*, vol. 41, no. 4p1, May 2006, pp. 1482–500. doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2006.00551.x.

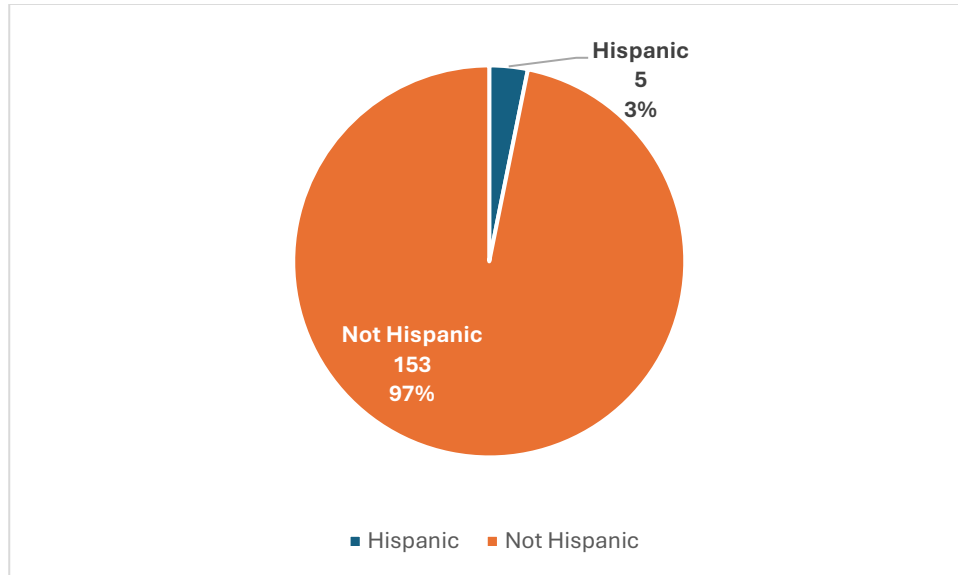
²⁰ “Most common Hispanic last names in the United States”. NameCensus.com, namecensus.com/last-names/common-hispanic-surnames. Accessed May 3, 2026.

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identified in the raw dataset as Hispanic. Of the five decedents listed as Hispanic in the raw data, all their surnames were on the Census list. With this in mind, this analysis assumes the cases with unknown ethnicity to be not Hispanic, for a total of five (3%) Hispanic decedents, and 153 non-Hispanic decedents (97%). This represents a small decrease from 2024, where seven decedents were Hispanic, or 5% of the data.

Deaths of Hispanic decedents were not evenly distributed between agency type; three of these cases were from law enforcement custody (roughly 6%) and two were from those in who died while in prison (roughly 2%). Figure 3 shows the breakdown of ethnicities in the data.

Figure 3: Deaths in Custody, by Ethnicity, 2025



When comparing the number of Hispanic decedents to the average population of Virginia, this figure shows that Hispanic individuals are underrepresented in the data. Hispanic individuals are roughly 11% of the population of Virginia²¹, and only 3% of the data presented here.

However, as with racial demographics, there are differences between the ethnic makeup of Virginia's population and those who are incarcerated or interact with the police. For interactions with law enforcement, Hispanic decedents were represented at a lower rate (6%) as compared to the general population (12%), and when compared to Hispanic individuals in law enforcement interactions (where Hispanic individuals are a larger proportion of the whole): Hispanics drivers were stopped, searched and arrested during traffic stops at higher rates than their share of the population (with the disparity being lowest for stops and highest for arrests)²². Hispanics are also overrepresented nationally among those who are shot by the police, making up roughly 18% of that population in 2025²³.

Hispanic individuals who died while in prison were a markedly smaller proportion (2%) of the whole when compared to the general population (12%). However, there are also differences between the incarcerated

²¹ United States Census Bureau QuickFacts. "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Virginia." *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/PST045223.

²² DCJS. *2023 Report on Analysis of Traffic Stop Data Collected Under Virginia's Community Policing Act*. 2023. www.dcls.virginia.gov/sites/dcls.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/cy23-cpa-tsreport-final.pdf.

²³ *Mapping Police Violence*. 2025. mappingpoliceviolence.org.

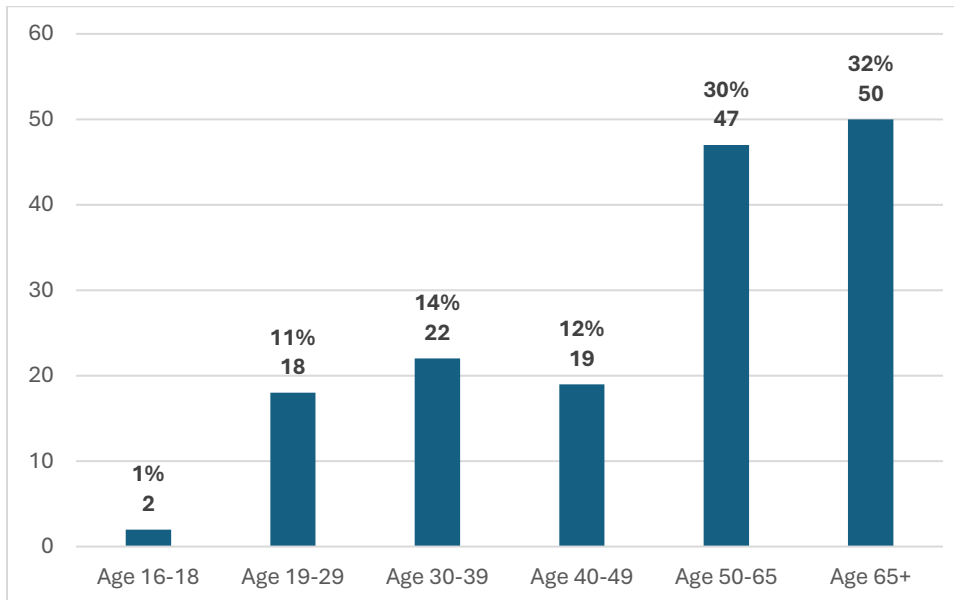
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population and the general population regarding ethnicity. Hispanic individuals are underrepresented in Virginia’s prison populations, only making up about 4% of inmates²⁴.

Decedent Age

Date of birth information was available for all 158 reported deaths in custody. The median age of decedents was 57, with the mean age at the time of death being 54. The oldest decedent was age 88 and youngest 16. Figure 4 shows a breakdown of the age of the decedents. It shows that relatively few decedents (12%) were below the age of 30, and most (62%) were above 50. Compared with 2024 the age of decedents increased slightly; the median age went up by three years, and the mean age went up by one year.

Figure 4: Deaths in Custody, by Age of Decedent, 2025



As was seen in previous sections, there are considerable differences between those who died in the custody of Virginia’s prisons and Virginia law enforcement. In state correctional facilities, where individuals might be in custody for decades, decedents tended to be older, with a median age of 63. For law enforcement agencies, where custody might be measured in minutes or hours, the median age of decedents was considerably lower, only 36.

Manner of Death

Deaths were categorized based on the circumstances, using the following categories provided by the BJA:

- Execution
- Accident²⁵
- Use of Force by Law Enforcement or Corrections Officer
- Homicide (an incident between two or more incarcerated individuals resulting in a death)
- Natural Causes
- Suicide
- Unavailable, Investigation Pending
- Other (agencies provide a short description of the manner of death for other cases)

²⁴ Department of Corrections. “Annual Report of the Quarterly Report of Demographic, Offense and Health Information of Offenders Incarcerated in VADOC Facilities – CY2025”, <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2025/RD1032>.

²⁵ Accidents include drug overdoses to be consistent with manner of death guidance provided by the OCME.

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DCJS received manner of death data for all the 158 civilian deaths in custody, however 50 (32%) of these reports were listed as “unavailable pending investigation.” Cases are more likely to be listed as “unavailable pending investigation” if they are more recent; roughly 2/3rds of the unavailable manner of death cases happened in Q3 or Q4 of 2025. This makes sense as such cases would be more likely not to have concluded their investigations and have manner of death information be known. Cases that were listed as unavailable pending investigation were also more common for incarcerated decedents²⁶ (49, 44%) than in the case of law enforcement-related deaths (1, 2%). DCJS works continuously to update manner of death information for cases that were previously reported to DCJS as investigation pending. In 2024 DCJS listed 33 cases as unavailable pending investigation, and 15 (45%) of these cases have been updated. DCJS has updated the manner of death analysis for the 2024 report in Appendix 3. For the cases with manner of death data, the majority were deaths due to natural causes and officer use of force, followed by accidents and suicides. Manner of death patterns have not changed dramatically compared with 2024. Table 5 presents the number of cases for each manner of death category. Note that the Table 5 calculates the percentages of the manner of death categories without the unavailable cases, which is different than the calculations used in the 2024 report.

Table 5: Deaths in Custody, by Manner of Death and Agency Type, 2025

Manner of Death	State Adult Correctional Facilities		Law Enforcement		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Execution	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Accidental	1	2%	13	28%	14	13%
Use of Force by Officer	1	2%	19	41%	20	19%
Homicide between inmates	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Natural Causes	52	85%	5	11%	59	55%
Suicide	6	10%	8	17%	13	12%
Other	1	2%	1	2%	2	2%
Total- Known	61		46		108	
Unavailable, Pending Investigation	50		1		50	
Total	111		47		158	

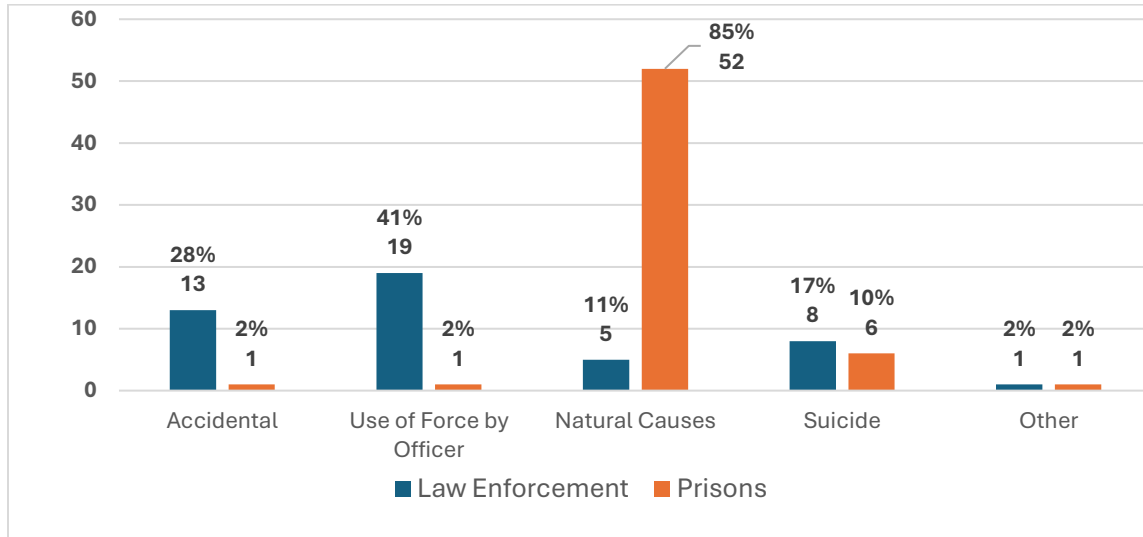
*Percentages listed do not include the cases listed as “unknown, pending investigation”, and therefore represent the proportion of cases where the manner of death is known, and may not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

The manner in which civilians died in custody was heavily dependent on the type of custody they experienced. Figure 5 compares the manner of death for law enforcement agencies and adult correctional facilities separately.

²⁶ The DOC is waiting for reports from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for these cases.

Virginia Civilian Deaths in Custody in 2025

Figure 5: Deaths in Custody, by Manner of Death and Agency Type, 2025



Manner of Death for Decedents in the Custody of Virginia Law Enforcement

Figure 5 shows that in-custody deaths for law enforcement agencies are primarily due to officer use of force (most commonly due to an officer-involved shooting), followed by accidents (most commonly during police pursuits) and suicides. DCJS identified 6 cases of overdoses included in the accidents data provided above.

Officer Use of Force

While there is no national dataset of in-custody deaths that uses the same definition of “in custody” as the DCJS data, there are media databases that collect information on civilians who are killed by the police that are roughly comparable to the use of force cases in the DCJS dataset. This makes a comparative analysis of deaths due to officer use of force possible. According to *Mapping Police Violence*, the number of individuals killed by the police across the United States in 2025 was 1,319: a rate of 0.386 deaths per 100,000²⁷. According to the DCJS data, Virginia experienced 19 such deaths, a rate of 0.214 deaths due to officer use of force per 100,000 Virginia residents²⁸. As can be seen, Virginia is below the national average for deaths due to officer use of force, an assessment supported by other state-by-state analyses of officer use of force involved deaths²⁹. While Virginia ranks below many states with higher rates of officer involved shootings, such as New Mexico (1.37) or Texas (0.432), it has higher rates than many other states such as New York (0.178) or Connecticut (0.194)³⁰. This also represents a decrease in the rate of officer-involved shootings from 2024, where the rate was .284 deaths per 100,000 people.

Manner of Death for those Incarcerated in Virginia’s Prisons

For those who died while incarcerated in Virginia’s prisons, the majority of deaths are attributable to natural causes, as seen in Figure 5. This would be expected given the aging incarcerated population, which is growing

²⁷ Population estimates as of July 1, 2025. Citation: United States Census Bureau QuickFacts. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States.” *Census Bureau*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045224.

²⁸ Population estimates as of July 1, 2025. Citation: United States Census Bureau QuickFacts. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Virginia.” *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/PST045223.

²⁹ Hemenway, David, et al. “Variation in Rates of Fatal Police Shootings Across US States: The Role of Firearm Availability.” *Journal of Urban Health*, vol. 96, no. 1, Oct. 2018, pp. 63–73. doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0313-z.

³⁰ These rates come from *Mapping Police Violence* and refer to 2025.

increasingly geriatric³¹, conditions that would lead to an increase in deaths due to natural causes. As the prison population continues to age, this trend is likely to continue.

Recommendations

The *Code of Virginia* (COV) § 9.1-192.1 requires DCJS to provide recommendations to reduce civilian deaths in custody. To accomplish this, the DCJS Criminal Justice Research Center consulted a working group of subject matter experts to provide specific recommendations. In 2025 DCJS bifurcated the working group members on the two types of cases present in the data: law enforcement and incarceration in state facilities. Each working group was given access to all cases available to DCJS in Q1 of 2026 and asked to provide recommendations on reducing civilian deaths in custody based on the data they reviewed or general best practices for the case type. These working groups met in quarter 1 of 2026. Under the advice of these working groups DCJS recommends the following to reduce the number of civilians deaths in custody³²:

Deaths in the Custody of Law Enforcement

1. Add authority to DCJS for additional data collection- Section § 9.1-192.1 of the *Code of Virginia* should be amended such that DCJS has the authority to contact agencies for additional information (when appropriate) that is required to draw inferences on how to reduce deaths in custody. For example:
 - a. de-escalation methods used.
 - b. the types of weapons possessed by decedents.
 - c. Whether officers met the provisions of §19.2-83.5 (Use of deadly force by a law-enforcement officer during an arrest or detention).
 - d. The initial reason for contact with the decedent.
 - e. The type of force used by officers.
2. Amend the Code to clarify what counts as “in custody”- While DCJS provides resources for agencies on how to interpret the *Code*, it is still the case that some agencies do not know what cases count as “in custody”. To reduce confusion, the *Code* should be amended to provide complete definitions for what constitutes a death in custody, in particular what constitutes “the process of being arrested” and specify that common case types, such as vehicle pursuits and officer involved shootings, are generally reportable.
3. Add requirement for agencies to update manner of death information- While it is unavoidable for agencies to sometimes provide incomplete information as investigations are conducted, and DCJS does ask agencies to voluntarily update information, the *Code* should be amended so that it is required for agencies to provide complete information to DCJS when it becomes available.
4. Enhance pursuit policies for high-risk pursuit situations- Law enforcement agencies should review and, where appropriate, refine existing pursuit policies to include specific risk assessments for motorcycles and high-speed pursuits (involving speeds around/over 100 mph). Such pursuits should only be initiated or continued if the necessity of apprehending the suspect outweighs the extreme risk to the public and officers). Such policies should also include the voluntary adoption of a standardized checklist during post-pursuit debriefing to evaluate alternatives such as aerial tracking, identification of an operator, or utilizing existing camera equipment in such high-risk pursuits.

³¹ VADOC Research Unit. *Geriatric Inmates in the State Responsible Confined Population FY2024*. 2024, adoc.virginia.gov/media/2024/fy2024-geriatric-report.pdf.

³² A recommendation about a specific practice does not imply that this practice led to a death in CY2025- only that the recommendation could reduce the chances of future deaths in custody.

Virginia Civilian Deaths in Custody in 2025

5. Incorporate mental health de-escalation protocols in armed encounters- Many deaths in custody involved apparent mental health crisis, which resulted in suspects arming themselves or self-harming during contact. To reduce the prevalence of such cases, agencies should promote the continued training on Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) principles and integrating mental health recognition cues (such as suicidal statements) into existing use-of-force training modules, while emphasizing time-and-distance tactics when feasible (maintaining cover while issuing commands).
6. Scenario-specific use-of-force decision training- Law enforcement agencies should be encouraged to develop and implement scenario-specific use-of-force decision training within existing training hours. Such training should focus on rapid threat recognition, lawful escalation and de-escalation decisions, and transitions between force options under stress. De-escalation techniques should be presented as conditional tools, so as not to induce hesitation when force is both reasonable and necessary.
7. Standardize post-arrest medical screening for substance involvement- Many deaths in custody occurred shortly after custody was established, often linked to narcotics. Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) could adopt a uniform checklist, drawn from current National Institute of Justice resources, for observing impairment signs during arrests (erratic behavior, mumbled speech), which could prompt immediate Emergency Medical Services staging. This could be disseminated through voluntary LEA peer reviews, avoiding new costs.

Deaths in the Custody of State Correctional Facilities

1. Improve data quality- Provide more detailed summaries of the cases to review, including more data related to mortality that could further enlighten the review committee. In addition, provide more information about the cause of death which would allow the review team to consider recommendations specific to natural and unnatural deaths.
2. Expand access to drug overdose services- Continue expanding access to and utilization of Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)/Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) services that have been shown to decrease the risk of overdose deaths in prison.
3. Expansion of peer recovery specialists- Inmates who have successfully worked through their own struggles with addiction or mental health challenges can be trained as Peer-Recovery Specialists. These individuals use their lived experience to support other inmates who are dealing with similar issues. They act as mentors, offering guidance, encouragement, and practical recovery skills to help others make positive changes while incarcerated. Correctional facilities should adopt or expand Peer Recovery Specialist programs statewide.
4. Improve education for healthy lifestyles for inmates- Offer targeted education to support healthier lifestyles and improved wellness among the inmate population.
5. Investigate the use of biometric scanning technology- Consider using biometric scanning technology to monitor vital signs of people with high-risk of self-harm.
6. Improve de-escalation trainings- Enhance training to staff on evidence-based de-escalation techniques, crisis intervention, and the safe and appropriate use of restraints. Training should emphasize strategies to minimize the risk of injury, prevent escalation, and reduce harm during interactions with individuals exhibiting disruptive or potentially violent behavior.

7. Review use of four restraints- Review the procedure on the use of four restraints and consider opportunities for reducing their use, especially on people with serious health issues, as immobilization and restrictions to the chest can increase the risk of adverse health outcomes. The review should also identify safe, clinically informed alternatives to reduce reliance on high-risk restraint practices.
8. Improve living conditions for long-term incarceration- Improve living conditions and environmental standards with a particular focus on the growing aging population in prison. Expand access to assisted living, skilled nursing, hospice, and medically supported infirmary settings capable of managing chronic illness, mobility limitations, cognitive decline, and end-of-life needs. Incorporate evidence-based design and physical plant modifications—such as improved ventilation, natural lighting, ADA-compliant layouts, fall-prevention features, and therapeutic housing configurations—that have been shown to enhance wellness, reduce medical crises, and improve overall health outcomes in carceral environments.
9. Increase staffing in facilities- Increase staffing capacity in both security and behavioral health roles to ensure adequate monitoring, timely crisis response, and consistent mental health support and reduce adverse outcomes associated with mental illness and increase the ability to prevent behavioral health crises. Adequate staffing levels also support more therapeutic housing options, reduce reliance on restrictive practices, and enable earlier identification of high-risk individuals.

Conclusion

This report relied on a data collection system that the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) has created, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) and the State Board of Local and Regional Jails (BLRJ), to fulfill the requirements set forth in the *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-192.1. DCJS wants to thank those departments for their efforts in collecting data and Virginia’s law enforcement and juvenile correctional facilities for submitting their data to DCJS.

According to the data submitted to DCJS, there were 216 deaths in the custody of Virginia’s prisons, local and regional jails, and law enforcement agencies. When examining those who died in Virginia’s prisons and in the custody of law enforcement (158 cases), the DCJS analysis found that decedents were far more likely to be men than women, and that Blacks are overrepresented in the data relative to the general population, and that in both cases this is likely to due to those groups being overrepresented throughout the criminal justice system. The data also showed that those who died in Virginia’s prisons tended to die due to natural causes, a trend that is likely to continue and become more pronounced in the future. By contrast, those who died in police custody tended to die due to the use of force by officers.

Appendix 1: Data Collection

To collect the data called for in the *Code of Virginia* (COV) § 9.1-192.1, DCJS designed and implemented a new deaths-in-custody data collection system, which began in quarter 2 of 2024. DCJS aims to ensure that every death in custody (as defined in the COV) is collected and analyzed. This data collection system integrates data collected directly by DCJS and data collected by the VADOC³³ and the BLRJ. Each of the above agencies is responsible for collecting deaths in custody data from different types of reporting agencies: DCJS receives data directly from law enforcement agencies and juvenile correctional facilities; VADOC from adult correction facilities; and BLRJ from local and regional jails. DCJS identified 216 cases of civilian deaths in custody in 2025, and this report analyzed the 158 cases that occurred in the custody of prisons and law enforcement agencies (there were no cases occurring in juvenile correctional facilities). Readers can reference the BLRJ report cited earlier for analysis of the 58 civilian deaths that occurred in the custody of Virginia’s local and regional jails.

To collect data from law enforcement agencies and juvenile correctional facilities, DCJS created an online form that agencies can use to report any deaths in custody, or to inform DCJS that no deaths in custody occurred³⁴. DCJS asks agencies to report their data to DCJS at the end of every quarter during an eight-day reporting period (DCJS accepts responses given outside the reporting period). To solicit responses, DCJS maintains a contact sheet for each applicable agency and contacts each to remind them to respond every quarter. Agencies receive at least three communications from DCJS reminding them of this data reporting: once two weeks before the end of the quarter, once when the data reporting period begins, and once before the data reporting period ends. DCJS also regularly follows up with agencies that have not yet reported their data after the data reporting period ends. When reporting their data, agencies are able to update previously reported cases and can report cases for previous quarters they had not yet reported.

DCJS asks reporting agencies to provide the following information, as required by COV § 9.1-192.1:

1. *The name, gender, race, ethnicity, and age of the deceased;*
2. *The date, time, and location of death;*
3. *The law-enforcement agency or correctional facility that detained, arrested or was in the process of arresting, transported, incarcerated, or otherwise had custody of the deceased; and*
4. *A brief description of the circumstances surrounding the death and the cause of death.”*

Response Rates

DCJS asks for data from 372 agencies: 348 law enforcement agencies (which includes police departments, sheriff’s offices, and campus police agencies) and 24 juvenile correctional facilities. Of the 348 law enforcement agencies, only 9 did not provide deaths-in-custody data to DCJS in 2025, for a response rate of 98.5%³⁵. The populations served by these agencies represent only about 0.7% of the total population of Virginia. Extensive review of other data sources found no reports of deaths in custody for these agencies. Of the 24 juvenile correctional facilities, 24 responded to the survey fully, for a response rate of 100%.

³³ According to COV § 9.1-192.1, prisons are supposed to report data to DCJS, however, DCJS has agreed for that data to be collected by DOC headquarters and then submitted to DCJS.

³⁴ Guidance from the BJA regarding reporting for the federal DCRA requires that reporting agencies (in this case DCJS) receive positive confirmation that custodial agencies experienced no deaths in a reporting quarter. As such, DCJS asks that reporting agencies/facilities respond to the form indicating no deaths have occurred.

³⁵ Of the 348 LEAs, 296 provided data for every quarter in 2025, though most of the 43 that didn’t provide full data missed only one quarter of data.

Appendix 2: Potential for Missing Deaths in Custody

One potential concern with this analysis could be that there are deaths in custody that are not included in the report because they were not included in the data. DCJS has examined two factors that could attribute to an undercount: the lack of response from some law enforcement agencies, and confusion on which cases count as “in custody” and therefore need to be reported. DCJS believes that the chances for missing cases are remote.

Response Rates

Some law enforcement agencies did not respond to the DCJS requests for data. This is potentially problematic for this data analysis as it is possible that an agency that experienced a death in custody did not report it to DCJS as they didn't respond to outreach. However, DCJS believes this to be very unlikely.

DCJS reached out to 348 law enforcement agencies and 336 agencies provided data to DCJS in 2025. However, of these, 296 agencies provided data for all four quarters of 2025 to DCJS. While 43 agencies did not report a full year's worth of data, many of those agencies did report data to DCJS for most of 2025: only 9 agencies (2.5%) did not report any data. Further, the agencies that did not provide data tended to be smaller agencies, which would be less likely to experience a death in custody as they have a small force and less contact with the public. The populations served by these agencies account for only about 0.7% of Virginia's total population. Combined with DCJS's efforts in monitoring news sources and other datasets, and the relative rarity in LEA's experiencing a death in custody (less than 10% of agencies reported a case), DCJS believes it is unlikely cases have been missed due to a lack of response.

Missing Data and the Definition of “In Custody”

After discussions with reporting agencies, DCJS has found there still exists some confusion with reporting agencies as to what constitutes “in custody.” It is not uncommon for agencies to believe that “in-custody” means that the agency has physical custody of the decedent before their death. This could be a problem, as agencies could be reporting that there were no deaths in custody even when they have a reportable case as they believe it is not applicable. However, DCJS believes the likelihood of this to be remote. DCJS has spent considerable effort working with agencies to provide clarity on what constitutes an in-custody death, and when combined with DCJS's reviews of other available datasets, DCJS knows of no cases that it believes to be a death in custody but that was not included in this report.

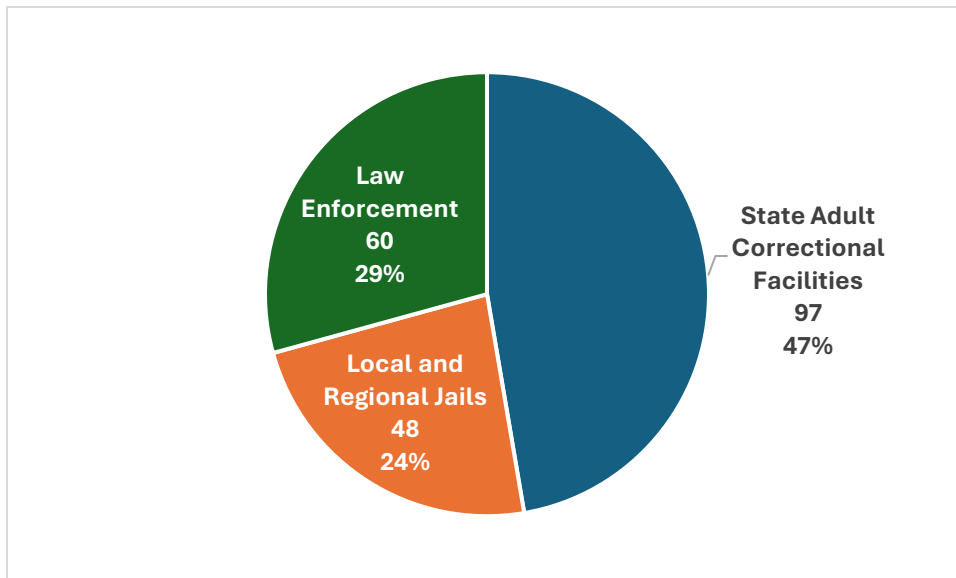
Appendix 3: Updates to 2024 Data

DCJS works to maintain up-to-date information on deaths in custody data, and report updates for past years as new information becomes available. This appendix will cover updates to the 2024 data originally presented in the report found here. The 2024 data have been updated in two ways. First, DCJS has identified 11 new cases which it has added to its database that occurred in calendar year 2024. Second, DCJS has updated the manner of death information for 15 of the 33 cases that were listed as investigation pending.

Additional Reportable Cases

DCJS’s 2024 report identified 194 reportable deaths in custody. DCJS has identified 11 additional cases, for a total number of 205 cases for the calendar year 2024. All of the 11 added cases were cases originally discussed in the previous report as cases that had not been reported to DCJS but that were identified in other sources as potential deaths in custody. DCJS has since determined these were applicable cases and added them to its data. All 11 cases were from law enforcement custody. Figure A-1 shows the new breakdown of cases by agency type. The added cases did not alter the gender, racial, ethnic, or age distributions significantly.

Figure A-1: Deaths in Custody, by Reporting Agency, 2024 updated



Updated Manner of Death Information

DCJS also works to continuously update manner of death information for the cases that were reported to DCJS. In 2024, 33 cases were reported without a manner-of-death categorization. DCJS has updated the manner-of-death information for 15 of these cases. The manner of death breakdown for the 2024 cases, along with the manner of death for the new cases, are shown in Table A-2 and Figure A-1 below.

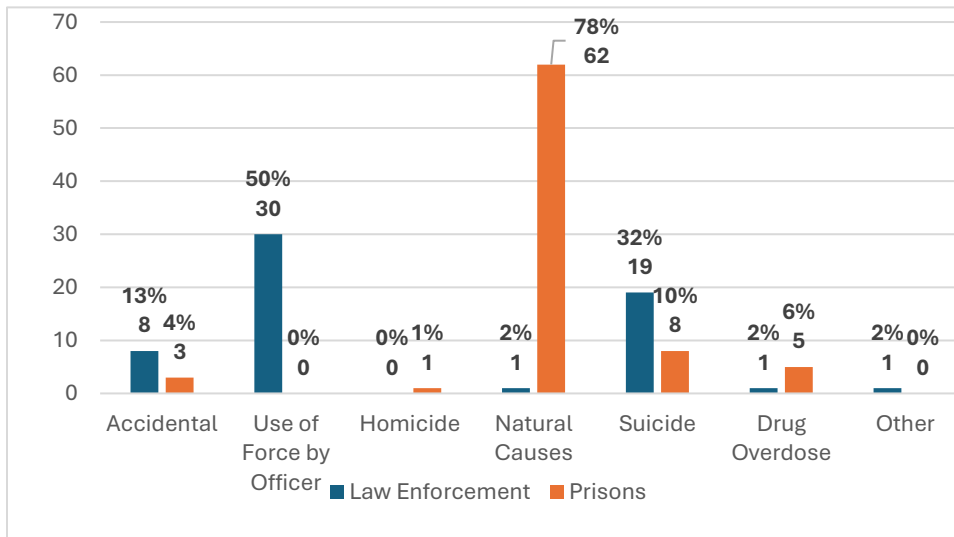
Virginia Civilian Deaths in Custody in 2025

Table A-1: Deaths in Custody, by Manner of Death and Agency Type, 2024 Updated

Manner of Death	State Adult Correctional Facilities		Law Enforcement		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Execution	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Accidental	3	4%	8	13%	11	8%
Use of Force by Officer	0	0%	30	50%	30	22%
Homicide between inmates	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Natural Causes	62	78%	1	2%	63	45%
Suicide	8	10%	19	32%	27	19%
Drug Overdose	5	6%	1	2%	6	4%
Other	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%
Total- Known	79		60		139	
Unavailable, Pending Investigation	18		0		18	
Total	97		60		157	

*Percent listed do not include the cases listed as “unknown, pending investigation”, and therefore represent the proportion of cases where the manner of death is known, and may not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

Figure A-2: Deaths in Custody, by Manner of Death and Agency Type, 2024 Updated*



*Percent listed here do not include the cases listed as “unknown, pending investigation”, and therefore represent the proportion of cases where the manner of death is known.