COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

S. Duke Storen
Commissioner

November 24, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Abigail D. Spanberger
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Marvin B. Figueroa
Secretary of Health & Human Resources

The Honorable Stanley M. Meador
Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

Michael Maul, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

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

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

FROM: S. Duke Storen

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

This report is submitted in compliance with Item 337.A. of the 2026 Appropriation Act, which states:

> By October 1 of each year, the sheltering coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the

Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

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

DS:gs
Attachment



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA EMERGENCY SHELTER CAPABILITIES AND READINESS

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 1, 2026

Table of Contents

Report Mandate v

Executive Summary v

Definitions vii

Program Overview viii

Contacts viii

Authors viii

Section 1: State Managed Shelter Program 9

Current Capacity and Capability 9

Plan Update 13

Emergency Workforce and Adjunct Emergency Workforce 13

Training and Exercises 14

Section 2: Initiatives Beyond the SMS Program 16

Regional Mass Care Coordinator Pilot 16

Alternate “Just-in-time” Sites 17

Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Project 17

Universal Electronic Shelter Registration Software 17

Section 3: Recommendations 18

Regional Mass Care Coordinators 18

Alternate “Just-In-Time” Sites 18

Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Framework 18

Universal Electronic Shelter Registration Solution 18

Conclusion 18

Appendix A: Legislative Mandate 20

2026 Appropriation Act, Item 337.A 20

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA EMERGENCY SHELTER CAPABILITIES AND READINESS

A Report for the Virginia General Assembly October 1, 2026

REPORT MANDATE

Item 337.A of the 2026 Appropriation Act establishes: By October 1 of each year, the sheltering coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the efforts of the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to maintain the State Managed Shelter Program as well as collaborative work between VDSS OEM and other jurisdictions and agencies to improve shelter capabilities and to increase overall readiness throughout the Commonwealth. The State Managed Shelter Program currently has the capacity to shelter 6,810 people and 1,807 pets.

VDSS continues to make the following collaborative recommendations to improve the Commonwealth's Shelter Capabilities and Readiness:

- Establish Regional Mass Care Coordinators as an ongoing VDSS capability to strengthen local shelter planning, preparedness, training, and coordination efforts.
- Create a list of potential "just-in-time" shelter sites (facilities that could supplement existing State Managed Shelter locations during catastrophic events) and complete programmatic assessments of each potential site.
- Continue to develop the Emergency Workforce (EW) and Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW) with motivated recruitment and prepare them through comprehensive training courses and exercises.
- Continue the work from the Shelter Strategy Framework Project by creating prioritized implementation plans for identified solutions.
- Identify, fund, and implement a universal state and local electronic shelter registration software program.

About VDSS and State Managed Shelters

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

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

State Managed Shelters (SMS) are activated by the Governor when local shelters are overwhelmedin the face of a catastrophic disaster. SMS operations are large, complex and vital. VDSS manages State Managed Shelters and

requires extensive multi-agency coordination to effectively provide safe respite for people in need.

DEFINITIONS

Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW)
The Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW) is a program managed by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) that allows state employees to volunteer for temporary disaster response and recovery assignments. Qualified AEW members may be assigned to support shelter operations and other emergency response functions during a disaster.

Emergency Workforce (EW)
The Emergency Workforce (EW) is a team of Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) employees who volunteer to support VDSS disaster response operations. EW members receive specialized training and may be deployed to support State Managed Shelter operations and other VDSS emergency management functions during a disaster.

Evacuee Accountability and Coordination System (EVACS)
The electronic registration system currently used in state-managed shelters for evacuee processing.

Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)
Colleges and universities, some of which serve as host sites for State Managed Shelters.

Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
The office within VDSS is responsible for managing the State Managed Shelter Program and broader emergency management activities.

Mass Care
Emergency services provided to disaster survivors, including sheltering, feeding, reunification, distribution of emergency supplies, and other services that support the immediate needs of affected individuals and communities.

Regional Mass Care Coordinator (RMCC)
A VDSS position that supports local and regional mass care preparedness and coordination efforts.

Statewide Alert Network (SWAN)
A system used for alerts and communication.

State Managed Shelter (SMS)
A type of disaster shelter managed by VDSS and operated by partner state agencies to supplement local sheltering capabilities during major disasters.

Virtual Activation and Rostering Exercise (VAREX)
An annual exercise used to assess partner agency's readiness and determine staffing capability for State Managed Shelters.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Virginia is at risk for a variety of natural, technological, and national security hazards, which pose a significant threat to the people of the Commonwealth. Such hazards include, but are not limited to, hurricanes, severe storms, floods, wildfires, winter storms, nuclear power plant incidents, transportation and other hazardous material (HAZMAT) incidents, and terrorist attacks. These hazards have the potential to displace people from their homes. Sheltering is a local responsibility first. When the needs of a displaced population exceed local sheltering capabilities, the State Managed Shelter Plan may be activated to supplement local shelter operations.

VDSS Office of Emergency Management (OEM) manages the State Managed Shelter (SMS) Program to ensure that anyone in the Commonwealth of Virginia who is seeking shelter during a major disaster has access to a safe, secure facility that meets basic sanitary requirements. Pre-identified shelter sites for general, medical, and pet sheltering across the Commonwealth are maintained through the SMS plan. The SMS plan can be activated in anticipation of a notice event or in reaction to an incident.

VDSS OEM also supports statewide shelter preparedness efforts beyond the State Managed Shelter Program through collaborative initiatives designed to strengthen local, regional, and state sheltering capabilities.

CONTACTS

AUTHORS

Tina Wang, State Shelter Coordinator
Tina.Wang@dss.virginia.gov, 804.659.9457

Kate Archie, Emergency Manager
Kate.Archie@dss.virginia.gov, 804.349.3258

Commonwealth Of Virginia Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

SECTION 1: STATE MANAGED SHELTER PROGRAM

VDSS OEM maintains the State Managed Shelter (SMS) Plan on a routine schedule. The SMS Program maintains readiness through scheduled plan updates, extensive volunteer management and recruitment for the Emergency Workforce, and a robust training and exercise program for shelter staff and partner agencies.

VDSS recommends the following action to strengthen the State Managed Shelter Program:

- Continue to develop the Emergency Workforce (EW) and Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW) with motivated recruitment and prepare them through comprehensive training courses and exercises.

CURRENT CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

The State Managed Shelter capacity is measured by the number of people that can be sheltered in facilities maintained at various participating state-owned colleges and universities. The current capacity of each pre-identified site is demonstrated in Table 1. Capacities are separated by population categories: General, Medical, and Pet. VDSS is primarily responsible for the overall operations of a shelter and the general population dormitory. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is primarily responsible for the medical needs population. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) is primarily responsible for the pet population.

Table 1: Current Capacity of SMS Facilities

Facility Name	General Capacity	Medical Capacity	Isolation Capacity	Pet Capacity
Christopher Newport University - Freeman Center	681	108	2	0
George Mason University - Fieldhouse	797	0	0	0
George Mason University - HUB	0	0	0	170
George Mason University - Recreation and Athletic Center	482	144	4	0
James Madison University - UREC	748	98	0	0
James Madison University - Convocation Center	311	62	2	0
Longwood University - Brock Commons Garage	0	0	0	664
Longwood University - Recreation Center	211	0	0	0
Longwood University - Willet Hall	0	194	9	0
Patrick Henry Community College - Philpott Technical Center	0	28	4	0
Patrick Henry Community College - Stone Hall	139	0	0	0
Patrick Henry Community College - Walker Cafe[1]	0	0	0	0
Richard Bland College - Barn Theater	0	0	0	75
Richard Bland College - Statesman Hall	101	18	6	0
VCU - Bowe Street Parking Deck	0	0	0	285
VCU - Siegel Center	549	84	0	0
VCU - Sports Medicine Center	0	0	3	0
Virginia Horse Center	0	0	0	230
Virginia Military Institute - Cameron Hall	144	6	5	0
Virginia State University - Multipurpose Center	330	108	10	0
Virginia State University - Randolph Farm Service Center and Head House	0	0	0	45
Virginia Tech - McComas	273	0	0	0
Virginia Tech - Alphin-Stuart Livestock Arena	0	0	0	263
Virginia Tech - War Memorial Gym	224	162	78	0
William & Mary - McCormack-Nagelsen Tennis Center	508	4	2	0
Total	**5,707**	**1,064**	**139**	**1,807**

The capability of State Managed Shelters is determined by the availability of essential resources needed to operate a shelter. The annual Virtual Activation and Rostering Exercise (VAREX) assesses staffing capability by notifying partner agencies of a simulated shelter activation and asking them to identify staff available to support shelter operations. VAREX provides a point-in-time snapshot of staffing

[1] Walker Cafe is used as the dining location for a shelter at PHCC. Use of this space is necessary to support sheltering operation, but it is not used as a sleeping area.

availability and is used to measure the Commonwealth's ability to meet State Managed Shelter staffing requirements. The goal is for each partner agency to increase its staffing capability over time until it can meet 100 percent of its identified staffing requirement and then maintain that capability.

This year, VAREX was conducted in March for two large sites, Christopher Newport University and William & Mary, with a combined capacity of 1,305 evacuees. Figure 1 shows the percentage of required staff identified by each partner agency for each site. Figure 2 provides a year-to-year comparison of partner agency staffing results. Results may vary from year to year based on staff availability and agency participation at the time of the exercise. Exercise results may not reflect the full agency staffing support that would be available during an actual activation.

If an agency cannot provide adequate staffing to meet the population's needs, VDEM has identified contractors that can fill in the gap. This secondary capability provides valuable surge staffing options, but it comes with a greater cost, increased variability in quality of personnel, and delayed activation time. Each partner agency should continue to bolster their internal staffing capabilities so as not to become fully dependent on private contractors.

Figure 1: Percentage of Required Staff Rostered Per Site

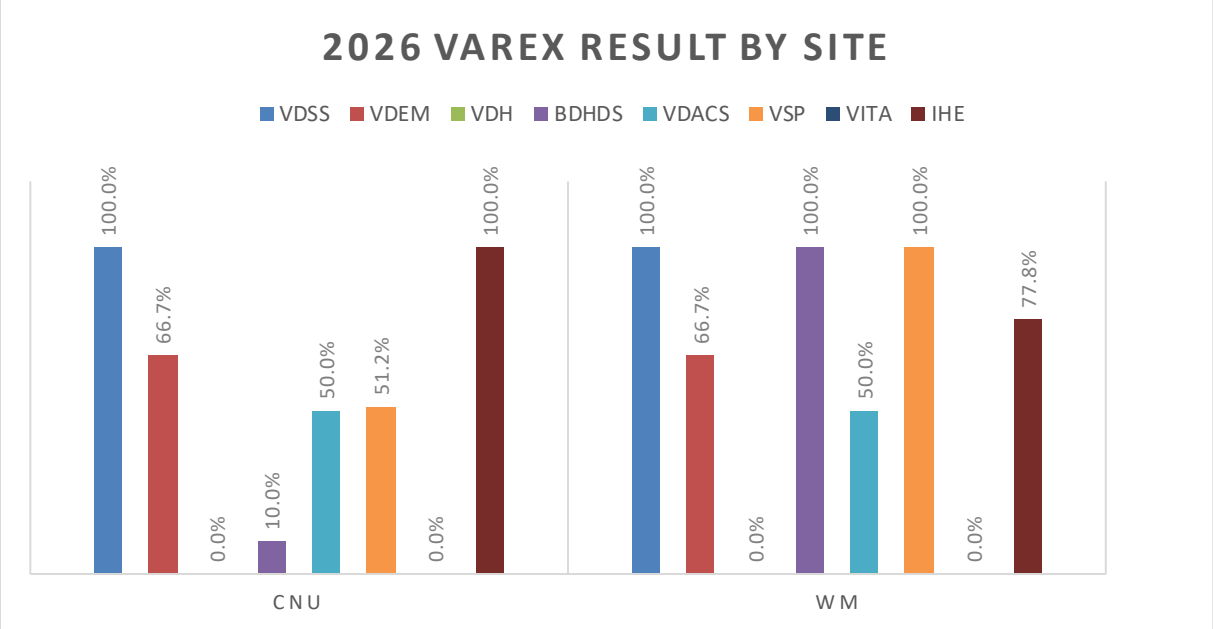
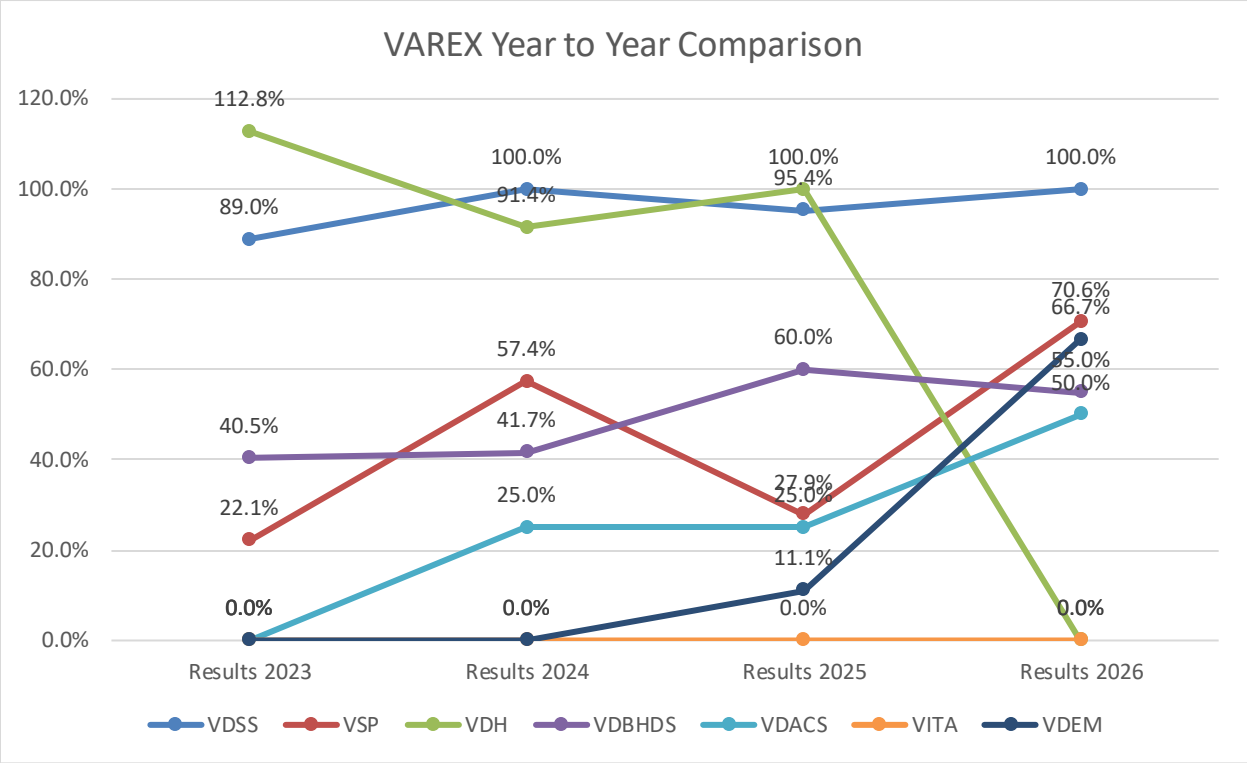


Figure 2: Year to Year Comparison of VAREX Results by Percent of Required Staff Rostered (2023-2026)



Shelters are staffed for 12-hour shifts, 24 hours a day. Therefore, to understand the full staffing requirement of shelter operations, Table 2 demonstrates the total number of different people needed for two shifts at each shelter site. As a result of this year's VAREX, staffing numbers for the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) were adjusted to reflect realistic personnel needed to provide adequate support for state shelters. This adjustment decreased the number of staff required by 82 people across all 13 shelter sites.

Table 2: Current Staffing Requirements for a 24-hour period

Site Name	Total DSS Staff Needed	Total Staff Needed, Including Partner Agencies
Christopher Newport	44	198
George Mason University	92	288
James Madison University	34	155
Longwood University	22	162
Paul D. Camp Community College	12	76
Patrick Henry Community College	20	88
Richard Bland College	18	82
University of Virginia	16	98
Virginia Commonwealth University	38	172
Virginia Military Institute	28	82
Virginia State University	26	113
Virginia Tech	60	185
College of William and Mary	36	134
Totals	**446**	**1,833**

PLAN UPDATE

All aspects of the SMS plan were updated in 2024, and all signatories signed the update by June 2025. The SMS plan is on a four-year maintenance schedule and will be due for another major update in 2028.

Site Specific Addendums to the SMS plan are updated biennially. The addendums are due for updates in 2026. Ten of the 13 state shelter sites completed a multi-agency facility walkthrough at their campuses and updated their site addendums.

EMERGENCY WORKFORCE AND ADJUNCT EMERGENCY WORKFORCE

The Emergency Workforce (EW) is made up of VDSS personnel who volunteer for disaster deployment in mass care operations and is bolstered by VDEM's Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW). The workforce demonstrates dedication to the program by participating in training, exercises, and team building events. The training and exercise program for shelter staff continues to grow more robust as additional exercises are incorporated into the training cycle every year.

VDSS continues to expand the Emergency Workforce (EW) and supplement staffing capabilities with the Adjunct Emergency Workforce (AEW). The AEW is a VDEM program that recruits employees from any state agency to volunteer for disaster response roles. AEW members may serve in any role that is available to the EW.

Between the EW and AEW, 237 staff are currently enrolled in the Shelter Specialist program. Of those, 112 have completed all required training and are fully deployable, while an additional 125 could be deployed with just-in-time training. Forty of the fully deployable members are trained to serve on the Shelter Management Team.

TRAINING AND EXERCISES

VDSS is frequently preparing staff to support SMS operations and fulfill their roles in the shelter. VDSS training prepares staff for deployment by providing them with the knowledge and tools needed for success. Proactively identifying and developing material to support training needs is important not only to prepare staff, but also to build morale and team camaraderie in advance of deployment. This support is accomplished through interactive training that encourages participation, solicits ideas for improvement, and addresses the concerns of the workforce.

Current training requirements are that all AEW/EW staff complete basic training once every three years and take one optional course of their choice per year in between basic training. VDSS continues to maintain a schedule of mostly virtual training sessions because they provide greater flexibility and range in access for EW members.

There are three existing courses required in basic training. They are:

- VDSS-OEM 1101: State Managed Shelter (SMS) Plan Overview
- VDSS-OEM 1103: State Managed Shelter (SMS) Specialist Role Training
- VDSS-OEM 1010: Statewide Alert Network (SWAN) Overview and How-To Guide

Optional courses and ongoing training opportunities include:

- **VDSS - OEM1001: Assisting Individuals with Access and Functional Needs in Mass Care Settings,** which provides a basic overview of supporting individuals with access and functional needs in shelters and other mass care activities
- **VDSS - OEM1002.1: Meeting the Emergency Needs of the Whole Community, Part 1,** which teaches people how to recognize and minimize the assumptions they make about others so that they can better understand the diverse population in Virginia and offer welcoming, safe and responsive emergency care.
- **VDSS - OEM1003: Psychological First Aid,** which outlines basic self-care activities for survivors of and staff responding to an emergency event
- **VDSS - OEM1004: Handheld Radio Tutorial,** which teaches people how to operate a handheld radio
- **VDSS - OEM1005: Trauma Informed Care in Mass Care Settings,** which focuses on a methodical approach to address stressful situations and interactions using empathy and compassion
- **VDSS – OEM1006: Deployment "Administrivia,"** which explains administrative and logistics details for a response deployment
- **VDSS - OEM1104: Shelter Management Team Orientation**, which trains interested and qualified shelter specialists to be shift supervisors
- **VDSS - OEM1106: Shelter Manager and Shelter Manager's Assistant Orientation,** a new offer this year, which trains interested and qualified shift supervisors to be Shelter Managers and Shelter Manager's Assistants

Of the 112 members of the workforce who have completed all required training, 40 have also taken one or more optional courses in the past year. This number demonstrates active participation and dedication from the workforce to the sheltering mission.

Additionally, VDSS conducted several training education and exercise events to reinforce training concepts, including:

- The annual Virtual Activation and Roster Exercise (VAREX) engaged the EW/AEW to respond to simulated deployment messaging. VAREX also allowed all partner agencies to get a "snapshot" of their actual staffing availability, as all agency staff respond in real time with their availability in real time.
- The Shelter Management Team meets every other month for one hour to discuss policy changes, participate in mini drills related to their roles, and become more familiar with each other. These meetings are voluntary but well attended. Participants regularly display an eager willingness to maintain a greater level of preparedness. This is crucial to building confidence in providing effective sheltering.
- A combined exercise was conducted at Longwood University in July 2026 for the Shelter Management Team. Corrective actions identified in the full-scale exercise from June 2025 were addressed in this exercise through a facility walkthrough drill, radio use practical tutorial, and a tabletop exercise focusing on interagency coordination for complex problems.

A robust training program complete with drills, exercises, and improvement planning are critical to enhancing the capabilities required to shelter people in the Commonwealth during a catastrophic disaster.

SECTION 2: INITIATIVES BEYOND THE SMS PROGRAM

In addition to maintaining the State Managed Shelter Program, VDSS continues to support collaborative initiatives to strengthen shelter capabilities and readiness throughout the Commonwealth.

REGIONAL MASS CARE COORDINATOR PILOT

In October 2025, VDSS launched a Regional Mass Care Coordinator (RMCC) pilot to provide regional support for local mass care preparedness activities, including shelter planning, training, exercises, and partner coordination. Three RMCCs are assigned responsibility for geographic regions across the Commonwealth and serve as points of contact for local departments of social services, emergency managers, public health partners, voluntary organizations, and other organizations involved in mass care preparedness.

Since the pilot began, RMCCs have assisted local and regional partners with shelter planning, reviewed plans and procedures, supported training and exercise activities, identified capability gaps, and facilitated coordination among organizations involved in mass care preparedness. RMCCs also participate in regional preparedness initiatives and work with local partners to strengthen relationships and improve coordination before disasters occur.

The pilot has provided VDSS with increased visibility into local mass care capabilities, challenges, and resource needs. Information gathered through the pilot has helped inform ongoing discussions regarding shelter readiness, training needs, and opportunities to strengthen local mass care preparedness throughout the Commonwealth.

ALTERNATE "JUST-IN-TIME" SITES

The development of additional and alternative shelter sites should be a key focus at the state level. Additional sites are needed to boost capacity for large-scale evacuations, while alternative sites are needed to reduce reliance on state-owned colleges and universities as shelter facilities. Catastrophic events may require shelter capacity beyond that currently available through existing local and state sheltering resources.

Following delays identified in the previous annual report, VDSS renewed efforts in 2026 to identify and assess potential "just-in-time" shelter facilities that could supplement existing State Managed Shelter locations during catastrophic events. Initial efforts have focused on re-establishing coordination with partner agencies and evaluating potential approaches for identifying and assessing candidate facilities. VDSS renewed efforts in 2026 to identify and assess potential "just-in-time" shelter facilities that could supplement existing State Managed Shelter locations during catastrophic events. Initial efforts have focused on re-establishing coordination with partner agencies and evaluating potential approaches for identifying and assessing candidate facilities.

These facilities would not be contracted until a disaster response activation required state sheltering. During non-disaster times, the list would require periodic reviews, as facilities would need to pass an initial assessment to determine that Americans with Disabilities Act and building code requirements are met, with availability and facility changes updated as needed.

The project remains in the early stages of development. Future efforts will focus on identifying candidate facilities and assessing their suitability for shelter operations.

COMMONWEALTH SHELTER STRATEGY PROJECT

The Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Framework was completed in May 2024 through a collaborative effort led by VDSS and VDEM. The framework identified sheltering gaps and proposed solutions to strengthen shelter capabilities, preparedness, and coordination throughout the Commonwealth.

The recommendations of the framework focused on strengthening local shelter staffing capabilities, improving accessibility, identifying an interoperable registration system, supporting multi-jurisdictional sheltering, and enhancing preparedness through planning and exercise resources.

In 2026, VDSS and VDEM renewed efforts to advance the framework and agreed to reestablish the shelter strategy working group. Planning efforts are underway, and local, tribal, regional, state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector partners have been invited to participate. The working group is expected to begin meeting in 2026 to identify priorities and support implementation of the framework's recommendations.

UNIVERSAL ELECTRONIC SHELTER REGISTRATION SOFTWARE

A universal state and local electronic shelter registration software solution has been identified as a priority through both the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Framework and discussions with local

sheltering partners. Such a system would improve information sharing among shelter operators, support situational awareness, and provide a more consistent registration process across jurisdictions and shelter types.

In 2026, VDSS conducted a Request for Information (RFI) process to better understand the capabilities, limitations, and costs associated with commercially available shelter registration solutions. Responses demonstrated that multiple products exist; however, additional evaluation will be needed to identify a solution that meets the operational needs of state and local sheltering partners.

VDSS continues to maintain the Evacuee Accountability and Coordination System (EVACS) for use in state-managed shelters. While EVACS provides basic electronic registration capabilities for state shelter operations, it is not a statewide solution and is not available for use by local jurisdictions.

Local partners continue to identify a universal shelter registration system as a need. While progress has been made in understanding available options, a preferred solution has not yet been identified, and implementation will require additional coordination among state and local stakeholders.

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this report, VDSS recommends the following actions to strengthen shelter capabilities and readiness throughout the Commonwealth:

REGIONAL MASS CARE COORDINATORS

Establish Regional Mass Care Coordinators as an ongoing VDSS capability to strengthen local shelter planning, preparedness, training, and coordination efforts.

ALTERNATE "JUST-IN-TIME" SITES

Continue efforts to identify and assess potential just-in-time shelter facilities that could supplement existing shelter resources during catastrophic events.

COMMONWEALTH SHELTER STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Continue implementation of the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Framework recommendations through development of prioritized implementation plans.

UNIVERSAL ELECTRONIC SHELTER REGISTRATION SOLUTION

Identify, fund, and implement a universal electronic shelter registration solution that can support both state and local shelter operations.

CONCLUSION

In summary, VDSS OEM continues to maintain and improve the Commonwealth's State Managed Shelter Program while supporting broader efforts to strengthen shelter preparedness throughout Virginia.

During 2026, VDSS continued to invest in shelter staffing, training, exercises, and collaborative initiatives designed to improve shelter capabilities and readiness at the local, regional, and state levels.

Progress has been made through continued development of the Emergency Workforce and Adjunct Emergency Workforce programs, the Regional Mass Care Coordinator Pilot, renewed efforts to identify potential just-in-time shelter sites, and the re-establishment of the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy working group.

While these efforts have improved readiness, significant opportunities for improvement remain. The Commonwealth's ability to meet shelter demand during a catastrophic event depends on continued improvements in local shelter capabilities, identification of additional shelter capacity beyond existing local and state sheltering resources, advancement of the Commonwealth Shelter Strategy Framework, and implementation of a statewide electronic shelter registration solution.

APPENDIX A: LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

2026 APPROPRIATION ACT, ITEM 337.A

By October 1 of each year, the sheltering coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Com