

Fire & EMS Stakeholders

2027 Legislative Priorities



Members of the Virginia General Assembly:

The process of gaining consensus on legislative priorities can be daunting, requiring significant collaboration and, often, compromise among all entities/stakeholders involved. Each year, the major fire and EMS stakeholder organizations from across the Commonwealth of Virginia meet to discuss their specific legislative needs and the key issues concerning the organizations as a whole. The consensus of the twelve major Virginia fire and EMS stakeholder organizations is that legislative items in this booklet represent our collective priorities for 2027.

As the presidents/chairpersons of the statewide fire and EMS stakeholder organizations listed below, we request that you consider and ultimately approve these major legislative initiatives, which would have a significant impact on fire and EMS in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Furthermore, we wish to inform you of other critical issues affecting the fire and EMS community that may require future legislation.

We thank you for your review and consideration of these critical matters.

Sincerely,

Kevin Duck

President

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

Kurt Detrick

President

Virginia Professional Fire Fighters

Joseph “Buster” Insley

President

Virginia State Firefighters Association

Amy Ward

President

Virginia Association of Governmental
EMS Administrators

Andy Neagle

President

Virginia Association of First Responders

Shawn Maddox

President

Virginia Fire Prevention Association

Charlie Knowles

President

VA Chapter—International Association
of Arson Investigators

David Newell

President

Virginia Association of Hazardous
Materials Response Specialists

Will Drewery

President

Virginia Emergency Management Association

Tanya Ison

President

Virginia Ambulance Association

Preston Main

President

Virginia Association of Public-Safety
Communications Officials

Steve Kopczynski

Chairman

Virginia Fire Service Council

Table of Contents

Policy Priorities:

Dedicated and Sustainable State Funding for Fire and EMS Response.....Pages 4-7

Points of Contact: Richard Harris, Virginia State Firefighters Association
Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

Expanding Cancer Coverage for Firefighters.....Page 8-9

Point of Contact: Jennifer Pike, Virginia Professional Fire Fighters

Enhanced Retirement Benefits for 911 Dispatchers.....Page 10-11

Point of Contact: Preston Main, Virginia APCO

Virginia Ground Ambulance Balance Billing Protections.....Page 12-13

Point of Contact: Tanya Ison, Virginia Ambulance Association

Other Important Issues:

Fireworks.....Page 14

Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

Single Exit Stairwell Concerns.....Page 15

Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

Recognition of Fire Marshals with Law Enforcement Authority.....Page 16

Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

Dedicated State Funding Source for Emergency Management.....Page 17-18

Point of Contact: Will Drewery, Virginia Emergency Management Association

Amend Code of Virginia to Establish Penalties for Reckless Acts Resulting in Injury or Death of Fire, EMS, and/or Law Enforcement Personnel.....Page 19

Point of Contact: Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

Amend Line of Duty Act Death Benefit.....Page 20

Point of Contact: Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

Dedicated and Sustainable State Funding for Fire and EMS Response



Points of Contact: Richard Harris, Virginia State Firefighters Association (ATL)
Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (PPE Grant)

Fire and EMS are an essential element of public safety across Virginia. Citizens have an expectation that when they call 9-1-1 for help, appropriately trained providers will respond with the needed equipment, regardless of what help is needed – law enforcement, fire and/or EMS. Yet, fire and EMS has not received general fund support in the same way that the law enforcement community does through 599 or Compensation Board funding. There are some very limited, fee-based funds passed through for the provision of fire and EMS services. In 2024, there was also a state grant for personal protective equipment. This funding model is not sustainable for providing the basic core services of fire and EMS throughout Virginia.

In 2023, a stakeholder workgroup surveyed Virginia localities on fire and EMS needs, receiving an 87% response rate.¹ The survey showed an increase in call volume, a decrease in the number of volunteers, and extreme inflation, resulting in an untenable situation for many communities. Call volume increased by 40% over the past three years, while state pass-through funding for fire and EMS has increased by only 6.67%. Nearly 18% of localities stated that they did not meet the minimum standard for response delivery outlined by the Virginia Department of Health's Office of EMS. In 2020, the cost of a standard fire engine was \$591,000. By 2023, that number skyrocketed to \$1,238,000 – a 109% increase in just three years.

EMS Supply Cost Increases (Office of EMS)

Item	Cost Increase from Spring '23 to Fall '23
Automatic External Defibrator	45%
Ambulance Remount	17%
Chest Compression Devices	17%
Monitors with 12 Lead Capability	10.6%
Power Stair Chairs	40%

Supply Cost Increases of a Standard Fire Engine

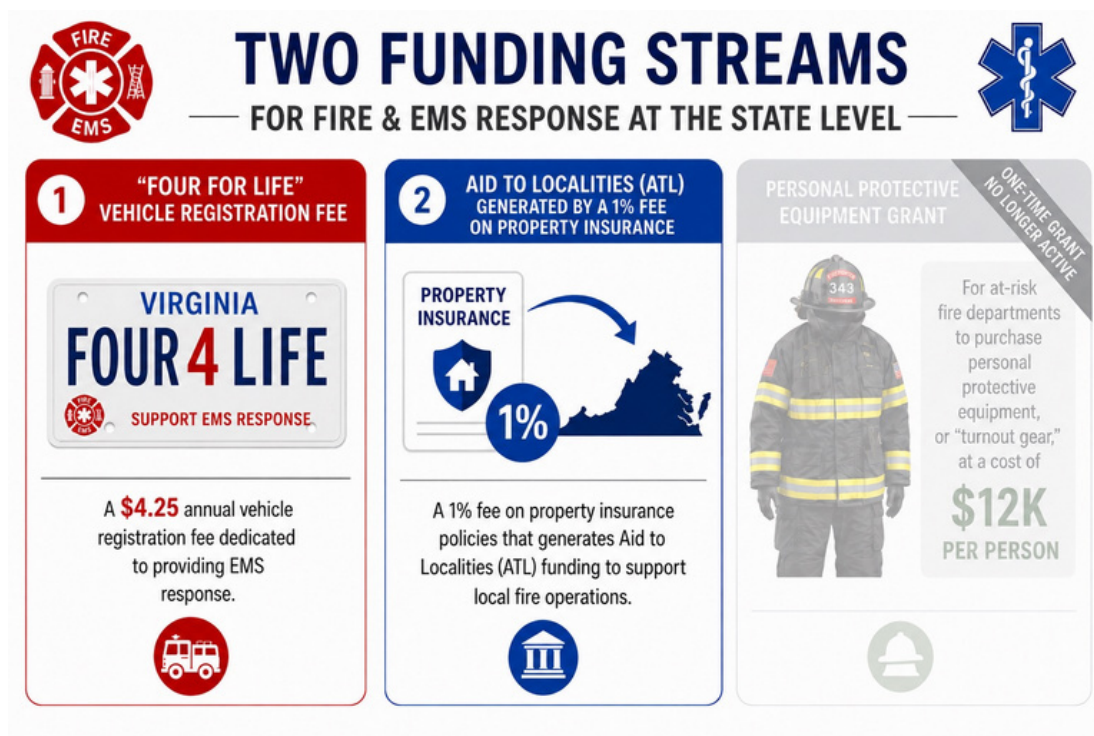
Year	Cost	Cost Increase
2020	\$591,000	N/A
2021	\$638,000	7.95%
2022	\$978,000	53.29%
2023	\$1,238,000	26.58%
Percent Increase 2020-2023		109.48%

¹ During the 2023 session, HB 2175 required a workgroup to study fire and EMS funding and produce a report.

In 2024, a third-party review of fire and EMS funding, conducted by the VCU Wilder School, found that “approximately 97.15% of the \$6.2 billion spent on fire and EMS from FY21-FY23 came from local governments. An estimated 1.13% came from federal sources, and 1.72% from the Commonwealth of Virginia.”² To ensure proper protection of Virginia’s residents, visitors, and critical infrastructure assets, local fire departments need additional partnership from the Commonwealth.

There are two current funding streams at the state level for fire and EMS response, including the “Four for Life” vehicle registration fee, and Aid to Localities (ATL) generated by a 1% fee on property insurance. In 2024, there was a highly successful grant for at-risk fire departments to purchase personal protective equipment, which costs about \$12K per firefighter.

Career and volunteer firefighters remain committed to serving their fellow citizens and visitors in the Commonwealth. However, the vast majority of fire and EMS departments are currently understaffed, underfunded, and, in many cases, lack the basic resources, equipment, and apparatus to effectively mitigate emergencies within their community.



Aid to Localities (ATL) & the Fire Programs Fund:

In 1985, the Virginia Fire Programs Fund was established to support the critical needs of the fire service, including training, equipment, and protective clothing. Revenues are generated by a 1% fee on property insurance, with the funds split – 75% returned to localities using a formula based on population, and 25% retained to fund the Department of Fire Programs (DFP) while distributing other

² During the 2024 session, the Appropriations Act requested a third-party review of fire and EMS funding, including various sources, and locality/ regional capacity and needs.

fire service grants. The 1% fee has not been raised since 1995, and the fund certainly has not kept up with inflation, so equipment purchases have suffered significantly. Additional funds are needed to support fire departments across the Commonwealth, allowing them to be more effective and efficient, protect citizens and businesses from loss of income and property, and improve the chances of minimizing injuries and deaths in Virginia.

Both career and volunteer fire and EMS providers remain committed to serving their fellow citizens in the Commonwealth. However, most of Virginia's fire and EMS services are currently understaffed, underfunded, and lack the resources for proper equipment, apparatus, and infrastructure. Many volunteer agencies, both fire and EMS, are on the verge of bankruptcy or not being able to provide the services needed in an emergency. The days of local fundraising (bake sales, stews, barbecues, etc.) are no longer sufficient to raise enough funds for the departments to continue operations. Both career and volunteer agencies need additional funds to continue serving the citizens of the Commonwealth effectively.

POLICY SOLUTION: Increase the surcharge on property insurance from 1% to 2% over the course of the next biennium, beginning with 1.5% by FY2028 and bringing the total to 2% by FY2029.

Personal Protective Equipment Grant:

In 2025, the Governor and General Assembly approved a new \$5 million one-time grant fund, using General Fund dollars, for the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VD FP) to award grants to financially vulnerable fire departments for the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), or "turnout gear," at a cost of \$12K per person.



The Town of Woodstock received PPE grant funding in 2024 to outfit four new firefighters with brand new, safe gear.

The Firefighter PPE Grant Program helped eligible fire departments offset the high cost of essential protective gear needed to safely respond to emergencies. Awards were determined by the Virginia Fire Services Board based on a locality's "fiscally distressed" status, with a maximum grant amount of \$100,000 per applicant.

Demand for the Firefighter PPE Grant Program significantly exceeded available funding, creating immediate public safety and workforce challenges across the Commonwealth. In its first grant cycle, VD FP received nearly \$9 million in requests but was only able to award the \$5 million allocated, leaving **\$4 million in unmet need**.

In total, **72 fire departments and localities received funding**, including 47 serving distressed communities and 64 majority-volunteer departments, which form the backbone of Virginia's emergency response system.

Despite prioritizing fiscally distressed communities, **funding limitations forced nine eligible applicants to receive only partial awards**, delaying full equipment replacement for firefighters who depend on this gear to safely respond to emergencies.

By reinstating this grant program, the Commonwealth ensures continued support for the protective equipment necessary to safeguard a firefighter when walking into a fire. This grant ensures communities across the Commonwealth are protected by well-equipped and resilient firefighters, ready to respond to the public in their greatest time of need.

POLICY SOLUTION: Reinstatement of the Personal Protective Equipment Grant and funding at \$2.5M per year to allow fiscally strained fire departments to purchase critical PPE, including turnout gear and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA).

Expanding Cancer Coverage for Firefighters



Point of Contact: Jennifer Pike, Virginia Professional Fire Fighters

One of the biggest threats to Virginia's firefighters is the prolonged occupational exposure to carcinogenic substances. According to Johns Hopkins University, existing personal protective gear can mitigate, but not fully prevent, a firefighter's exposure to carcinogens.¹ As a result, firefighters are more likely to contract cancer than the general population and have a 14 percent increased risk of dying from the disease.² Recently, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) re-classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1), on the basis of sufficient evidence for cancer in humans. As a result, **Virginia's Fire and EMS stakeholders unanimously support expanding occupational cancer coverage for firefighters and emergency medical services personnel.**

POLICY SOLUTION: Expand occupational cancer coverage for firefighters and emergency medical services personnel.



Background:

In 1994, the Virginia Workers' Compensation Act was expanded to provide presumption coverage to firefighters whose death or disability resulted from five types of occupational cancers, including leukemia, pancreatic, prostate, rectal, and throat cancers. Later, ovarian and breast cancers were added by the 2000 General Assembly as more women joined the fire service.

In December 2019, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released its comprehensive report on Virginia's Workers Compensation System and Disease Presumptions.³ As a result of the JLARC report, legislation was passed during the 2020 General Assembly Session to add brain, colon, and testicular cancers to the presumption statute.

In July 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), re-evaluated firefighting and re-classified fire fighter occupational exposure as a Group 1 carcinogen, stating "there is sufficient evidence for cancer in humans." IARC found that "occupational exposure as a fire fighter causes cancer."⁴ The IARC found sufficient evidence for cancer in humans for bladder cancer, and limited evidence for several other cancers including non-Hodgkin lymphoma and melanoma. For decades, the IARC had classified fire fighter occupational exposures as "Group 2B" meaning the exposures were "possibly" carcinogenic. The

new classification, “Group 1 – carcinogenic to humans,” now puts firefighting on a par with tobacco and benzene.

Virginia’s firefighters are taking all preventive measures that they can, however, after enduring extensive exposure to toxins and carcinogens, firefighters will continue to be diagnosed with occupational cancers. When additional scientific studies are completed and data is updated, Virginia Code should be updated to reflect new research and data. Virginia’s fire and EMS stakeholders unanimously support adding lung, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, skin, and kidney to the list of cancers covered under Virginia Code 65.2-402. Our firefighters and their families have earned these protections and we need to honor their service by ensuring they get them appropriately whenever they receive that diagnosis.

¹ Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. *Virginia’s Workers’ Compensation System and Disease Presumptions* (December 2019), Retrieved <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt530.pdf>.

² National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *Study of Cancer among U.S. Fire Fighters*. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters/health.html>

³ Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. *Virginia’s Workers’ Compensation System and Disease Presumptions* (December 2019), Retrieved <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt530.pdf>.

⁴ International Agency for Research on Cancer (July 2022) <https://www.iarc.who.int/news-events/iarc-monographs-evaluate-the-carcinogenicity-of-occupational-exposure-as-a-firefighter/>

Enhanced Retirement Benefits for 911 Dispatchers



Point of Contact: Preston Main, Virginia APCO

Emergency-9-1-1 (E-9-1-1) dispatchers are known as the "first" first responders, because without them, no first responder would ever be dispatched to an incident. Dispatchers experience many of the same psychological trauma and stressors as law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel. Moreover, dispatchers rarely get closure, as they are not focused on a single incident and therefore do not see the final resolution or closure to a 9-1-1 call.

Virginia's fire and EMS stakeholders unanimously support adding 9-1-1 dispatchers to the list of local employees eligible to receive enhanced retirement benefits. These benefits would be similar to those provided to Virginia State Troopers when the locality elects to offer enhanced retirement benefits. Under current law, localities may provide such benefits to first responders, including firefighters and emergency medical technicians, police officers, sheriff's deputies, and certain other hazardous duty positions, but not 9-1-1 dispatchers. Why should they be treated any differently?

Additionally, recruitment and retention of E-9-1-1 dispatchers is a nationwide problem, due to the nature of the job. Challenges include the trauma stressors, difficult hours worked, and lower salaries compared to other first responders. Recently, the Commonwealth of Virginia released the Emergency-9-1-1 Border Response Workgroup Report pursuant to Item 391 of the State Budget. The workgroup assessed the deficiencies related to the timely routing of E-9-1-1 calls to the appropriate public-safety answering point (PSAP) across either state or county borders. The



The workgroup also collected information and assessed problems with the current system; reviewed solutions already implemented by localities and citizen groups; identified best practices; and provided recommendations to the General Assembly on technology, training, and compensation. The workgroup clearly identified increased benefits and compensation for dispatchers as one of its key recommendations.

POLICY SOLUTION: Add 9-1-1 dispatchers to the list of local employees eligible to receive enhanced retirement benefits.

Background:

This was a primary legislative agenda item by this Fire and EMS Stakeholder group during the 2022 General Assembly and was subsequently referred to a JLARC study in 2023.

The JLARC report validated the high level of responsibility of 9-1-1 communications officers. This group continues to feel strongly about this benefit for our E-9-1-1 dispatchers and was pleased to see that the JLARC study confirmed the critical role they provide in the public safety profession. This would give localities the authority to opt in to provide enhanced coverage, similar to (but not eligible for the hazardous duty stipend) those provided under the State Police Officers' Retirement System (SPORS). The benefit includes the ability to achieve full retirement benefits at age 50 with 25 years of service and the higher retirement multiplier.

Offering enhanced retirement benefits is a win-win for both employees and the locality and will help with retention and attrition rates. Localities that invest in these benefits can reduce turnover costs, training expenses, and improve response time, ultimately benefiting the public safety operations within the locality. The cost of the benefits would be borne by the locality that chooses to opt in. We continue to strongly support legislation to add E-9-1-1 dispatchers as eligible employees for enhanced retirement benefits.

Virginia Ground Ambulance Balance Billing Protections



Point of Contact: Tanya Ison, Virginia Ambulance Association

Fire and EMS stakeholders support legislative action to enact balance billing restrictions that protect patients while ensuring fair reimbursement for ground-ambulance response, treatment, and transport.

During the last Virginia legislative session, lawmakers considered bills to shield patients from surprise ambulance bills. An essential protection, since no one should face unexpected, high out-of-pocket costs after calling 9-1-1 or requiring ambulance transport. These patient safeguards must be paired with fair reimbursement standards. Without clear payment requirements, insurers could underpay for ambulance services thus pushing already strained EMS agencies to absorb the costs and weakening a system critical to public safety and health.



The Virginia Ambulance Association (VAA) worked with legislators to craft a balanced model based on successful approaches in other states. Progress was made, but key provisions were not finalized before committee deadlines. The VAA continues collaborating with patrons and expects the legislation to return during the 2027 session with stronger, more workable protection for both patients and EMS agencies.

POLICY SOLUTION: Enact balance billing restrictions that protect patients, while ensuring fair reimbursement for ground-ambulance response, treatment, and transport.

Our proposal is modeled after legislation recently adopted by neighboring states of West Virginia and Tennessee. Virginia should adopt a similar balanced framework that includes:

- **Equal patient cost-sharing and allowables** for in-network and out-of-network ground ambulance services, recognizing that patients typically cannot shop for ambulance providers.
- **Maximum patient copay of \$100 per claim** for ground ambulance treatment and transport.
- **Minimum allowable payment** set at the lesser of 350% of the Medicare fee schedule for ground ambulance transport at the time of service, or the amount billed by the agency providing the service. (West Virginia adopted 400% and Tennessee 425%)

- **Timely adjudication and documentation requests** – Claims adjudication and additional documentation requests (ADRs) must occur within 30 days of claim submission, with payment or denial within 30 days of receiving ADR responses.
- **Direct payment to the provider** for ground-ambulance response, treatment, and transport.

Virginia should act now to protect patients from surprise ambulance bills, while keeping the EMS system strong. The right legislation will cap out-of-pocket costs, require fast and transparent insurer payments, and guarantee fair reimbursement for lifesaving and life-sustaining care. Anything less shifts costs from insurers onto the EMS providers Virginians rely on every day.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Fireworks



Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

The Fire and EMS Stakeholders oppose any action by the General Assembly that would expand the sale, possession, and use of consumer fireworks.

Fireworks have been restricted to certain consumer fireworks since the General Assembly (GA) enacted these restrictions in 1950 under the Trade and Finance title of the Code of Virginia (COV). The term “Permissible Fireworks” was created and became effective in the COV under Title 27 in SB 683 during the 2002 GA session. The restricted types of consumer fireworks have historically provided a safer experience for the citizens and visitors of the Commonwealth of Virginia in terms of use and handling. In the last 12 months, there have been multiple reported fireworks injuries from misuse and/or misfire/malfunction, and one death from misuse of consumer fireworks that are not classified as permissible fireworks in Virginia. These incidents emphasize the dangers of fireworks that explode, rise, and/or travel.

14,741

**fireworks-related
injuries treated in
U.S. emergency
departments in 2024**

The Consumer Product Safety Commission’s (CPSC) 2024 Fireworks Annual Report highlights 21 fireworks-related deaths during 2024 in the United States. This is a 162 percent increase from 8 in 2023. There were an estimated 14,741 fireworks-related injuries treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments during 2024. There has been a statistically significant and steady increase in fireworks-related injuries per year from 2008 through 2024. * Note: Per the CPSC, reporting of fireworks-related deaths for 2024 is not complete, and the number of deaths identified for 2024 should be considered a minimum.

Any expansion of the type or use of fireworks in the Commonwealth of Virginia should come with critical increases in funding for fire, EMS, and law enforcement agencies identified as first responders by a locality, as well as the fire marshal’s office having authority, and consideration should be given to more stringent fire codes, such as residential sprinklers. Of the sales tax or fee revenue generated by the local sale or use of permissible or consumer fireworks, a significant percentage of such revenue should be dedicated to funding to first responders and the fire marshal’s office, enabling them to handle increased calls for service.

Language shall remain in Title 27 of the COV that gives authority to local governments to prohibit, by ordinance, the sale and use of permissible or consumer fireworks.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Single Exit Stairwell Concerns



Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

Virginia's fire and EMS stakeholders strongly oppose any code change that reduces the minimum safety requirements found in the national model codes. The proposed code language seeks to lessen provisions that require a minimum of two exit stairwells in a Residential Group R-2 occupancy of over three stories, as required by the International Code Council (ICC) International Building Code (IBC) – the model code adopted by the Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development. The longstanding code development process in the Commonwealth should not be circumvented by legislative action.

Through a national code consensus process utilized for decades, model codes include redundancy in egress options to ensure occupant emergency escape and first responder access during emergencies. At four stories and above, Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings (EEROs) start to become technically and functionally infeasible. EEROs are windows or doors that provide occupants a means of escape and rescue. There is currently no code requirement for EEROs in four-story and above



R-2 occupancies. Allowing the construction of residential buildings over three stories with a single-exit stairwell is contrary to the lessons learned from decades of tragedies resulting in loss of life.

Concerns:

- Places occupants and firefighters in danger.
- Many fire departments lack the personnel and equipment required to safely evacuate large numbers of people from elevated floors and through a single stairwell.
- Performing emergency response operations in a single stairwell that is simultaneously being used for occupant escape negatively impacts rescue and fire suppression efforts.
- Modern hazards, such as those posed by lithium-ion batteries, underscore the need to be able to exit a building quickly and safely in an emergency.

Additionally, the International Association of Firefighters, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation oppose a code change that lessens the minimum model code language.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Recognition of Fire Marshals with Law Enforcement Authority



Point of Contact: Shawn Maddox, Virginia Fire Prevention Association

The Code of Virginia (COV) references and recognizes law enforcement officer (LEO) positions in multiple Code sections. In these sections throughout the COV, the position title “Fire Marshal” is not referenced or identified as being a LEO. COV Title 27 §27-34.2:1 states that when a person is appointed pursuant to §27-36 and when authorized by the local governing body appointing the fire marshal, they shall have the same police powers as a sheriff, police officer, or law enforcement officer. The police powers granted by this section shall not be exercised until satisfactory completion of a basic law enforcement course designed by the Department of Fire Programs. The inclusion of the position title Fire Marshal, with police powers per §27-34.2:1 is sought for inclusion in all locations of the COV listing the various LEO positions.

“There are numerous safety, health, penalty, retirement, and other benefits that are afforded to other LEO positions that are not offered to Fire Marshals.”

Within the COV, there are numerous safety, health, penalty, retirement, and other benefits that are afforded to other LEO positions that are not offered to a Fire Marshal with law enforcement powers because of the position title exclusion. However, for clarification, the inclusion of the position title Fire Marshal is not being sought for inclusion in the definition of LEO found in COV Title 9 §9.1-101.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Dedicated State Funding Source for Emergency Management



Point of Contact: Will Drewery, Virginia Emergency Management Association

Emergency management is a core function of government and an essential component of public safety. In Virginia, every political subdivision is required under Va. Code Ann. § 44-146.19 to maintain an emergency management program, designate an emergency management coordinator, and maintain a current emergency operations plan. While these statutory requirements establish a statewide baseline for preparedness, they are not accompanied by a dedicated state funding mechanism to ensure every locality has the resources necessary to fulfill these responsibilities.



As a result, emergency management capacity varies significantly across the Commonwealth. While some jurisdictions are able to support full-time emergency management professionals, many others rely on fire chiefs, law enforcement personnel, or other local officials who perform emergency management as an additional duty alongside their primary responsibilities. The increasing complexity of disasters – including severe weather, flooding, cyber incidents, public health emergencies, hazardous

materials incidents, and other emerging threats – has expanded the demands placed on local emergency management programs well beyond what can reasonably be sustained as a collateral assignment. Without dedicated funding and professional staffing, Virginia risks uneven preparedness, inconsistent capabilities, and reduced resilience across its communities.

The Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan (COVEOP) recognizes that emergencies are best managed at the lowest level of government. Achieving this principle requires local governments to possess the personnel and capacity necessary to carry out the full spectrum of emergency management responsibilities. Professional emergency managers are essential to:

- Coordinate comprehensive planning, training, and exercise programs.
- Build partnerships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, and community stakeholders.
- Lead coordination and information-sharing before, during, and after incidents.
- Advance mitigation initiatives that reduce future disaster losses.
- Foster a whole-community approach that addresses the needs of all Virginians.

Although Virginia's emergency management system has benefited greatly from federal preparedness grants such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) and the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), these funding sources were intended to enhance local capabilities — not serve as the primary means of sustaining them. As federal priorities evolve and future preparedness funding becomes increasingly uncertain, Virginia cannot rely on temporary or fluctuating federal appropriations to support a core governmental responsibility established under state law.

Establishing a dedicated state funding source would provide a sustainable foundation for emergency management throughout the Commonwealth by:

- Providing every locality with the resources necessary to support a professional emergency management program.
- Reducing dependence on uncertain federal preparedness funding.
- Promoting consistent preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation capabilities across jurisdictions of every size.
- Strengthening coordination among local, regional, state, private-sector, and nonprofit partners.
- Improving Virginia's ability to protect lives, property, infrastructure, and economic stability before, during, and after disasters.

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive evaluation of emergency management funding, the General Assembly enacted Senate Bill (SB) 98 during the 2026 Session, directing a statewide study of emergency management funding needs. This effort represents a pivotal milestone for the Commonwealth. For the first time, Virginia will have the opportunity to establish a data-driven understanding of the foundational resources required to support effective emergency management programs in every locality. The study's findings should establish the baseline standard for emergency management capability across the Commonwealth and provide policymakers with an objective framework for developing a sustainable, equitable, and long-term funding model.

By leveraging the findings of the SB 98 study to establish a dedicated state funding source, Virginia can move beyond a system that depends heavily on variable federal assistance toward one that reflects the Commonwealth's commitment to fulfilling its statutory responsibilities and protecting its communities. Investing in emergency management is an investment in the resilience, continuity, and long-term safety of every Virginian.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Amend Code of Virginia to Establish Penalties for Reckless Acts Resulting in Injury or Death of Fire, EMS, and/or Law Enforcement Personnel



Point of Contact: Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

Currently, there is a gap in Virginia criminal law that does not allow for criminal charges to be filed against a defendant who recklessly caused the injury of first responders and civilians. Legislation allowing for the criminal prosecution of individuals who recklessly or negligently act with disregard for the risk of catastrophe resulting in injury would remedy this situation. It would also benefit the First Responder community if the proposed legislation included an upgrade in the grading of the offense when the offender knew, or should have known, that the event would pose a greater risk to first responders, and a further increase if the incident results in the injury or serious injury of first responders.

“There is a gap in Virginia criminal law that does not allow for criminal charges to be filed against a defendant who recklessly caused the injury of first responders and civilians”

As an example, on February 16, 2024, a house explosion on Silver Ridge Drive in Sterling, Virginia, killed Firefighter Trevor Brown and injured 10 other first responders, some seriously. In summary, but for the death of Firefighter Brown, if only injuries had occurred and there had been no death, there would have been no felony charges that could have been filed as a result of this incident, even though the facts that resulted in the defendant's conviction for involuntary manslaughter would have been the same had a criminal charge been filed for the more than 10 first responder injuries.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: Amend Line of Duty Act Death Benefit



Point of Contact: Devon Cabot, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

"The real value of Virginia's benefit has eroded by 65% in that time, leaving surviving families with substantially less practical support."

Virginia should amend its Line of Duty Act death benefit so that the one-time payment of survivor benefits for traumatic and medical line-of-duty deaths receive an automatic annual cost-of-living increase tied to the Consumer Price Index, consistent with the inflation-adjustment approach used by the federal Department of Justice Public Safety Officers' Benefits program. The current Virginia traumatic death benefit has remained unchanged since January 1, 2006 at \$100,000 (for traumatic deaths), while the federal PSOB benefit is adjusted annually and is \$461,656 for eligible deaths occurring on or after October 1, 2025

(valoda.org). As a result, the real value of Virginia's benefit has eroded by 65% in that time, leaving surviving families with substantially less practical support each year as housing, childcare, education, health care, and other essential costs rise.

Establishing a CPI-based annual adjustment would not create a new benefit category; rather, it would preserve the intended value of the existing benefit and ensure that the Commonwealth's recognition of covered public safety officers under the LODA Act does not diminish with inflation. This change would provide predictability for state budgeting, fairness for survivors, and a clear statement that Virginia's commitment to those who make the ultimate sacrifice will remain meaningful over time.

Fire & EMS Stakeholder Organizations

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association is a statewide professional organization dedicated to developing and supporting current and future fire service leaders across the Commonwealth. Through leadership academies, conferences, training programs, mentorship opportunities, and legislative advocacy, the association promotes professional excellence, collaboration, and the advancement of Virginia's fire and emergency services community.

Virginia Professional Fire Fighters

Virginia Professional Fire Fighters is the statewide representative organization for more than 11,000 professional firefighters, paramedics, and communications officers. Through its network of local affiliates, the organization advocates for its members and promotes policies that strengthen fire and emergency services across Virginia.

Virginia State Firefighters Association

Founded in 1886, the Virginia State Firefighters Association represents more than 9,000 members and serves as a leading advocate for Virginia's fire and rescue community. The association works to improve fire protection, support emergency responders, and advance legislative and policy initiatives that benefit fire and rescue organizations statewide.

Virginia Association of Governmental EMS Administrators

The Virginia Association of Governmental EMS Administrators is a professional organization dedicated to advancing emergency medical services throughout the Commonwealth. The association promotes leadership, collaboration, and the development of EMS policies and programs at the local, regional, and state levels.

Virginia Association of First Responders

Since 1935, the Virginia Association of First Responders has represented emergency response agencies across the Commonwealth. Serving more than 350 agencies and approximately 22,000 members, the association supports fire, EMS, rescue, and law enforcement professionals through advocacy, training, and statewide collaboration.

Virginia Fire Prevention Association

The Virginia Fire Prevention Association brings together fire marshals, inspectors, investigators, code officials, firefighters, and other safety professionals dedicated to fire prevention and public safety. The association promotes the development, enforcement, and advancement of fire and life safety codes and regulations throughout Virginia.

Virginia Chapter – International Association of Arson Investigators

The Virginia Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators supports fire and arson investigators through professional development, training, and information sharing. The organization promotes high professional standards while advancing fire prevention, fire investigation, and the suppression of fire-related crime.

Fire & EMS Stakeholder Organizations (cont.)

Virginia Association of Hazardous Materials Response Specialists

The Virginia Association of Hazardous Materials Response Specialists serves as the unified voice for hazardous materials response professionals across the Commonwealth. The association promotes collaboration, resource sharing, training, and the exchange of technical expertise to strengthen hazardous materials response capabilities statewide.

Virginia Emergency Management Association

The Virginia Emergency Management Association is a statewide organization dedicated to supporting emergency management professionals and strengthening disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts. The association promotes collaboration and best practices to help protect lives and property across Virginia.

Virginia Ambulance Association

The Virginia Ambulance Association represents both public and private ambulance providers throughout the Commonwealth. The association advocates for the EMS industry and supports its members through education, collaboration, and engagement on issues affecting emergency medical transportation and patient care.

Virginia Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials

The Virginia Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials represents public safety communications professionals across the Commonwealth. The organization promotes leadership, professional development, technology advancement, and industry standards that strengthen 9-1-1 and emergency communications services.

Virginia Fire Service Council

The Virginia Fire Service Council advocates for and promotes the interests of the Virginia fire service through formulating consensus positions regarding issues impacting career, combination, and volunteer fire departments throughout the Commonwealth. It seeks to collaborate with stakeholders throughout the Virginia emergency services community to determine common ground in order to continuously improve our ability to reduce risk from all hazards to the citizens of the Commonwealth.