

VSA COVID-19 Actions

The Virginia Sheriffs Association (VSA) has been in constant communication with our members and the regional jails on the issues relating to the coronavirus. The VSA is connecting the sheriffs with resources.

Monday, VSA partnered with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) in a webinar with the sheriffs and regional jails. The webinar was well attended by both sheriffs and regional jails and VDH discussed screening, testing and isolation and quarantine issues.

VSA held a separate statewide conference call with sheriffs to follow up on all the issues discussed in the webinar and in addition identified needs in specific areas as follows:

1. Contact the Supreme Court of Virginia regarding an Emergency Declaration from the Chief Justice of the SVC. A declaration came out March 16 in the afternoon and was distributed to the sheriffs. This was a necessity to obtain local court orders relating to court proceedings.
2. A need to identify isolation cells for inmates with the virus if it becomes necessary, either by using available jail beds or moving well inmates to other beds to free beds in local jails. Larger jails are more able to accommodate this than smaller jails. The Compensation Board has been contacted to provide a jail population report to be used by sheriffs to identify available empty beds. Secretary Moran was requested to provide the location of any available beds in DOC that may be used for this purpose. Website was updated with available beds, based on Compensation Board data, and DOC Director Harold Clarke indicated that he was looking into opening Coffeewood in Culpeper.
3. A need to Identify any actions relating to training in our academies to keep classes to less than 50 people (CDC Recommendation), and to request DCJS to review waiving certain training requirements if staff is needed to provide service during this crisis. DCJS has responded and the information is posted on the VSA website.
4. A need to identify special protocols that may be required when sheriffs deal with attended and unattended death cases in their communities if the virus is suspected. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has been contacted to assist with this.
5. A request for VSA to develop, approve and disseminate additional “best practices” standards relating to admission to local jails, including staff, inmates and visitors, specifically related to the virus. Jails have already closed visitation and implemented sanitizing and other protocols based on recommendations with their local health departments.

VSA has established a Coronavirus website page for use by our members that address many areas where questions have been answered or resources have been identified: <https://members.vasheriff.org/page/CoronavirusPreventionResources>.

VSA sent a survey to all sheriffs on March 16 to determine what resources or equipment are needed from the federal level. This will be communicated to the National Sheriffs’ Association (NSA), participating in a national effort to identify needed resources to be funded by the U. S. Congress.

This is a developing process and an abbreviated version.