

## **Virginia to Receive Federal Funding to Provide Safe Hotel Housing for First Responders during COVID-19 Response**

*Initiative will support health and safety for essential workers and their families while helping to stem spread of pandemic*

**RICHMOND**—The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) announced today that the Commonwealth has received funding approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide hotel accommodations for Virginia’s first responders and essential personnel working to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the Commonwealth.

The announcement came after State Health Commissioner Dr. M. Norman Oliver signed an order on April 9 for “non-congregant sheltering” to be made available “to serve the first responder workforce ... who seek such shelter and to support this critical workforce.” The order defined “first responder workforce” as fire, EMS, law enforcement, emergency management and certain public health workers.

The order further notes that “first responders are in frequent close contact with individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 as a routine component of their job duties, and therefore are at increased risk to exposure to COVID-19 and as such could potentially transmit COVID-19 to co-workers, patients, or family members.”

“First responders are at an enhanced risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus,” said Dr. Jeff Stern, State Coordinator of Emergency Management. “As we seek to stem the spread of the virus, it is critically important that we offer these essential emergency service providers access to safe, convenient forms of shelter so that they may continue to do their jobs fighting the pandemic and also not risk exposing others – especially their families – by going to their homes between their shifts.”

Reimbursements will be made under Category B of FEMA’s Public Assistance (PA) program, in accordance with section 502 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, and subject to established FEMA assistance protocols and procedures, the letter added.