



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

John Kelly
Chair
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Margaret Disney
Secretary
Heidi L. Lawyer
Executive Director

Washington Building, Capitol Square
1100 Bank Street, 7th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219

804-786-0016 (TTY/Voice)
1-800-846-4464 (TTY/ Voice)
804-786-1118 (Fax)
info@vbpd.virginia.gov
www.vaboard.org

May 7, 2014

TO: Ruth Anne Walker, Director of Legislative Affairs
Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

FROM: Heidi Lawyer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heidi Lawyer".

RE: DBHDS POLICY 1043(SYS) 08-1: Disaster and Terrorism Preparedness, dated June 6, 2008

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (the Board) appreciates the opportunity to offer comment on DBHDS Policy 1043(SYS) 08-1 which is currently under review. The Board has been engaged in the area of emergency preparedness for several years, including providing recommendations on emergency services in the 2011 edition of its *Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia* and participating in the Health and Human Resources (HHR) Secretariat Emergency Preparedness and Response and Recovery Workgroup. This workgroup includes members of agencies that fall under the Secretariat as well as representatives of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. The Board would like to offer the following recommendations for consideration on the aforementioned policy.

References Section

The Board recommends that the Policy:

- Include current responsibilities of DBHDS, Community Services Boards (CSBs) and state operated facilities. This Information can be found in the 2012 Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan (COVEOP).
- Reference changes made to *Code of Virginia §2.2-200 et seq.*, resulting from SB 381. This legislation, signed by the Governor on April 1, 2014, strengthens homeland security by transferring operations to the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. Combining the Secretariat of Public Safety with Homeland Security ensures emergency disaster and

response functions are aligned with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM).

- Reference Executive Order 12, effective April 9, 2014, to continue the Governor's Task Force on Improving Mental Health Services and Crisis Response. The recommendations in this EO by Governor McAuliffe are important to stabilizing and supporting individuals with mental health challenges during an emergency.
- Reference the Health and Human Resources (HHR) Secretariat Emergency Preparedness and Response and Recovery Workgroup. The Secretary assembled this team in 2009 to integrate planning within the HHR Secretariat and VDEM.

The Board also recommends that DBDHDS consider removing the word "Terrorism" from the Policy title. Since 2008, the state of Virginia has transitioned to an "all hazards" approach. The efforts underway in emergency preparedness are related to multiple emergencies including:

- severe weather conditions,
- biological hazards,
- chemical hazards,
- domestic disturbances, and
- natural and other disasters.

Background Section

The Board recommends that the Policy:

- Reference the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities as DHBDS is now the Commonwealth's Developmental Disabilities (DD) agency. The needs of individuals with DD other than an intellectual disability should be acknowledged.
- Include information regarding planning for emergencies as well as during each phase of an emergency.
- Connect CSB planning to other agencies beyond the existing DBHDS infrastructure such as non-profit resources in the community.

Community Services Board Preparedness Section

The Policy references outreach and collaborative relationships of CSBs with local public health departments and emergency management agencies. The Board recommends that the Policy be modified to:

- Include volunteer organizations in outreach efforts.
- Expand the role of CSBs in working with the Psychological First Aid Program (PFA). One important concept in the PFA program is inclusion of community volunteers to ensure DBHDS does not exhaust their supply of psychiatrists and psychologists.

Purpose Section

The Board recommends that the Policy be revised to:

- Include individuals with developmental disabilities other than ID.

Policy Section

The Board recommends that the Policy be revised to:

- Ensure that the needs of individuals with DD other than ID are addressed with respect to crisis response. There may be behavioral challenges resulting from an emergency that are not mental health issues, but need to be addressed. For example an individual with autism may have a significant response to an emergency. However, the strategies for stabilizing that individual may also differ significantly from a mental health crisis intervention.
- Include in in-service training requirements for CSBs and facility clinical staff, information about positive behavioral supports and natural community supports as strategies in times of emergency.
- Expand DBHDS' education role beyond policymakers and decision-makers to individuals with disabilities and their family members. This should include but not be limited to educating individuals and families on how to:
 - locate a back up support provider before a disaster;
 - shelter in place; and
 - make a survival kit.

Empowering individuals with disabilities and their family members to prepare for a disaster is important. While the below references do not need to be contained in the Policy, the Board recommends incorporating these resources into education and outreach efforts:

<http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>

<http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia/getakit/disabilities>

<http://www.ready.gov/plan-for-locations>

- Require annual education of CSBs and state facility staff on the COVEP. The COVEOP has several "annexes." Emergency Support Function (ESF 8) most closely addresses medical needs populations. In addition, VDEM also provides guidance to help communities in:
 - Accessing public health and medical needs to include support of regional and local teams.
 - Evacuating in cooperation with federal, local, and private organizations.
 - Assisting with the planning for and coordinating the transporting of seriously ill or injured patients and medical needs populations from casualty collection.

The Board appreciates the opportunity to provide input. Feel free to contact me at 804-786-9369 or Heidi.Lawyer@vbpd.virginia.gov should you have any questions.