



Monday, January 6, 2025

RE: VAA Position Statement on the Location and Structure of the Virginia Office of EMS

The Virginia Ambulance Association represents the interests of EMS agencies and providers across the Commonwealth. Our membership spans volunteer, career, and combination agencies; commercial, municipal, and third-party services; and programs from both emergent and non-emergent settings. Our mission is based on EMS as the backbone of healthcare access for some of our most vulnerable populations and in many individuals' most vulnerable moments. We have reviewed the potential options for the location and structure of the Virginia Office of EMS and conclude that the Office of EMS should be elevated to Department status under the Secretary of Health and Human Resources. Short of elevation to department status, we would suggest it remain within the Department of Health.

Our position is based on the following main points:

- EMS providers are healthcare providers. The trajectory of our industry is aligned with healthcare and is shifting from a focus on our responses to a focus on the provision of care and the outcomes of that care. This is particularly apparent when you consider Community Paramedicine and Mobile Integrated Healthcare initiatives.
- EMS includes more than 911 systems. EMTs at all certification levels provide interfacility transfers, access to primary and specialty care appointments, transport to life-sustaining treatments such as dialysis, radiation, and chemotherapy, discharges from hospitals to empty beds for new patients accessing care, and industrial or workplace injury and safety programs.
- Under the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, OEMS would be aligned with the remainder of the healthcare industry while providing increased influence at the state level for both regulatory and budgetary processes.
- While we work in partnership with agencies under the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, our missions are not the same. Every program under Public Safety includes as a part of its mission, the prevention, investigation, prosecution, or punishment of crimes, including the Department of Fire Programs' Fire Marshall system. EMS agencies have made efforts to remain separate from the legal system, to maintain the public trust that calling for medical care will not affect or be affected by legal status.
- A large percentage of EMS care and transport is completed by private commercial EMS agencies, and a significant majority of EMS care is provided by non-fire-based agencies. These agencies and the services they provide are not represented in the information offered in other recent position statements regarding the location of OEMS in Virginia.

For the purpose of maintaining an effective EMS system in Virginia, and both protecting and advocating for the resources needed to support that system, we make the recommendation that OEMS be elevated to Department status under Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources.