



NEWSLETTER

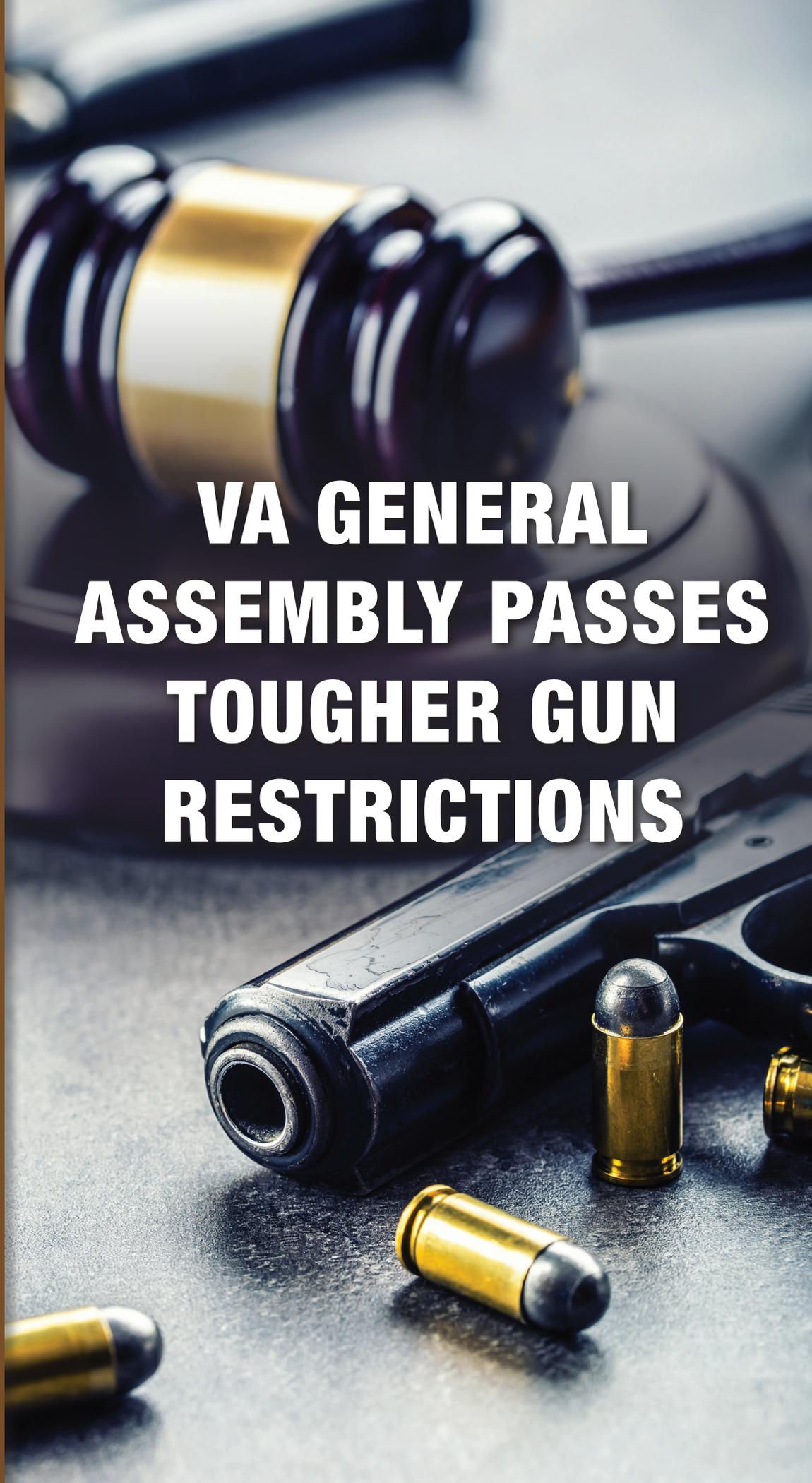
FALL EDITION 2020



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VA GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASSES TOUGHER GUN RESTRICTIONS



2020-2021

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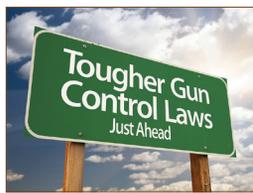
Sheriff Michael W. Taylor
Pittsylvania County

Sheriff Ernest L. Giles, Sr.
Sussex County

Executive Director
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We Want to Hear from You ...

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NEW GUN LEGISLATION

This year, seven gun bills passed in the VA General Assembly. These bills include limiting handgun purchases to once a month; universal background checks on gun purchases; allowing localities to ban guns in public buildings, parks and other areas; and a red flag bill that would allow authorities to temporarily take guns away from anyone deemed to be a risk to themselves or others.

The red flag law would prohibit any person subject to a permanent protective order from possessing firearms while the

order is in effect. Anyone under such an order would have 24 hours to surrender their firearms to law enforcement or sell or transfer them to someone who is allowed to have them.

Other new laws include requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen guns to police within 48 hours, tightening training requirements for people applying for concealed carry permits by requiring them to complete an in-person safety course, and imposing stricter penalties for "recklessly leaving" a loaded unsecured gun in a way "that endangers life or limb" of a child under 14.

EXPANDING DECERTIFICATION PROCESS

Virginia lawmakers held a special session to discuss criminal justice reform among other issues. While there were many items law enforcement and the General Assembly disagree on, one item all agreed with was the topic of decertification. The Virginia Sheriffs' Association (VSA) and other law enforcement groups provided input during an earlier hearing of a Virginia House of Delegates panel. According to VSA Executive Director John Jones, "Decertification needs to be used more, and it needs to be expanded."

Under current state law, a law enforcement officer can lose the ability to be a law enforcement officer if they:

- have been convicted or pleaded guilty to a felony;
- have been convicted or pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor involving "moral turpitude;"
- have been convicted or pleaded guilty to a sexual offense or domestic assault;
- flout training requirements; or
- test positive or refuse to submit to a drug screening.

There is broad support among the Virginia State Police, the VSA, and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police for amending the state's decertification policy, allowing for more officers to be censured for using excessive force.

Jones urged more funding for pay at sheriff's offices, which he said would help with turnover. He rejected the idea of citizen review boards, arguing that since sheriffs are elected, there is sufficient public input in the job they are doing. Jones said he supports the idea of a statewide database for decertified officers.



On **November 3, 2020**, Virginians will go the polls and cast their vote for the next President of the United States, U.S. Representatives and U.S. Senators, as well as local offices and proposed constitutional amendments.

Learn about all the candidates and cast your vote — either through an absentee ballot or at your local polling location!

To find out your assigned polling location, please visit <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/>

GET YOUR FLU SHOT THIS YEAR

During this upcoming flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is anticipating that the coronavirus pandemic will continue to spread along with flu viruses. Protect yourself and protect the ones you love: Get a flu shot this fall to help lessen your chances of getting the flu and spreading it to others.

BODY CAMERA LAW

A new law passed in the VA General Assembly, which took effect on July 1, 2020, requires all law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth to establish a written policy for the operation, maintenance and storage of body cameras, using the model policy established by the Department of Criminal Justice Services as a guide if the officer uses body cameras.



It also requires a period of public comment before sheriffs' offices and police departments deploy the equipment. VSA supports the law, because it can also protect officers against false accusations. Law enforcement groups opposed a body camera mandate, because of the cost barrier for some localities, which might not be able to afford the cameras and the expense of storing the data.

SENIOR PEDESTRIAN DEATHS SPIKE

We've written a lot about the rise of pedestrian deaths on our roadways over the past few years. Sadly, the latest report indicates that the rate of pedestrian deaths continues to go up rather than down. In fact, nationwide, pedestrian deaths are at a 30-year high. According to the Governors Highway Safety Administration, Virginia fares worse than Washington, D.C. or Maryland. Deaths during the day have seen a 16 percent spike, but most pedestrian deaths occur when it's dark out — and they can be attributed to distracted driving.

Another alarming trend to report is that senior pedestrian deaths rose by 95 percent from 2018 to 2019 in Virginia. The top factor contributing to senior pedestrian fatalities was not crossing the street at an intersection, occurring within a few miles of their homes. For drivers, it's difficult to spot a pedestrian on a road if they are outside of an intersection, especially at night.

UNCLAIMED PROPERTY VIRTUAL CALL EVENT

The Virginia Department of Treasury is partnering with VSI and VSA - members can call:

1-833-302-0704

Thursday, October 29, 2020 • 10:00am - 6:00pm

- Utility Deposits • Unpaid Wages • Customer Refunds
- Securities & Investments • Money from Insurance Policies
- Bank Accounts • Dividends • Uncashed Checks • and More!



LATEST COVID-19 SCAM WARNING

VA health officials are warning residents that scammers may call pretending to be COVID-19 contact tracers in order to trick you into giving them your money. Legitimate contact tracers will inform people when they have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19 and then advise them about testing, quarantines, and monitoring for symptoms.

Contact tracers will never ask for money, bank details, or credit card information. Their services are covered by tax dollars, and so, they will never ask for your money.



BEWARE OF SHADY "CONTACT TRACING" APPS

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened the door to scammers seeking to exploit digital contact tracing. Attorney Generals of 39 states sent a letter to Google and Apple urging these companies to take steps to protect consumers' sensitive health information.

Any Virginian using a contact tracing app should ensure the app is affiliated with a legitimate institution and read all the fine print before submitting your personal information.

According to the CDC, while a flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19, it will reduce the burden of flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths on the health care system. Recommendations indicate that individuals get a flu vaccine by the end of October, before flu begins spreading through your community. Protection from the vaccine occurs within two weeks of the vaccination and lasts throughout the flu season.



PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM VSI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN W. JONES



On behalf of all of us at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute, I hope you and your family are excited to welcome back cooler temperatures and fall foliage to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Whether it's taking a hike, driving on a scenic route, or biking to view foliage across the state, Virginia has so much to offer, and you don't need to

go far to enjoy it. To ensure this fall season is a safe and enjoyable one, I've included some information on how to stay one step ahead of scammers who are trying to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic in order to dupe you out of your personal information and money.

These are unprecedented times, and the COVID-19 crisis has presented law enforcement and our citizens with unique challenges, but one thing I know for certain is that our communities are strong and resilient — and together we will weather this storm.

I want you to know public safety is the number one priority of Virginia sheriffs and all of us here at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute. If you have any questions or concerns about the subjects we discuss in the issue — or crime prevention efforts in your community — please contact me.

It is my privilege to serve as Executive Director of VSI. I urge you to help your community's law enforcement efforts by reporting crimes or suspicious activity when you see them. We all play an important role in keeping our communities a safe place to work, play, live, and raise our families.

I deeply appreciate your involvement as a loyal supporter of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John W. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive.

John W. Jones, Executive Director
Virginia Sheriffs' Institute
901 East Byrd Street, Suite 1301
Richmond, Virginia 23219

OPIOID CRISIS SURGES DURING COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

The opioid epidemic had already been raging well before COVID-19 reached our shores, but stay-at-home orders that were implemented across the country to rein in one health crisis have exacerbated the opioid crisis by pushing individuals battling opioid addiction into isolation.

This situation has resulted in decreased access to treatment, including naloxone and sterile needle and syringe services. The COVID-19 crisis is also a risk factor for those in sobriety to relapse.

While some believed the stay-at-home orders would prevent opioid users from accessing drugs, that doesn't seem to be the case. In fact, overdoses and deaths from opioid abuse continue to be a growing concern in our state and across the country, and we remain particularly concerned about a possible increase in opioid-related mortality from illicitly manufactured fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

In Virginia, a total of 1,193 drug overdose deaths involved opioids in 2018. In that same year, Virginia providers wrote 44.8 opioid prescriptions for every 100 persons compared to the average U.S. rate of 51.4 prescriptions.

As you know, Virginia law enforcement officers are on the frontlines of this crisis — on the streets preventing overdose deaths. We are also playing a critical role through task force partnerships, training, data tracking, and more.

Heroin and prescription drug abuse is not just a law enforcement issue; it is a public safety concern and a problem that continues to impact Virginia families. Opioid addiction can grip anyone from any background and ultimately impact families from all walks of life.

To help turn the tide, resources are being targeted to help bring more prosecutions against drug dealers and traffickers, cut off distribution, support recovering addicts, and decriminalize behaviors that can save lives. As always, I ask for your support in reporting any suspicious activity to your local law enforcement officials.

The Virginia Sheriffs' Institute solicits articles and comments from associate members of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute for inclusion in this newsletter. Articles and comments should be directed to: John W. Jones, Executive Director, Virginia Sheriffs' Institute, 901 East Byrd Street, Suite 1301, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or phone (804) 225-7152.