



# NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION 2021



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# AS VACCINE ROLLS OUT, BEWARE COVID-19 SCAMS



2020-2021

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**Executive Director**  
John W. Jones

**We Want to Hear from You ...**

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# COVID-19 VACCINE PRESENTS OPPORTUNITY FOR SCAMMERS

Now that the COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by the FDA and are being distributed to the American public, it's important that VSI members remain vigilant against scams.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, scammers have tried to exploit this crisis by selling fake personal protective equipment and products to treat or prevent COVID-19, without proof they work. They've used every medium — online, in-person, and over the phone — to try to trick Americans out of their hard-earned money and personal information.

These bad actors continue to prey on the fears and uncertainties we're all experiencing during the ongoing pandemic. That's why as the COVID-19 vaccine continues to get distributed in Virginia communities and across the country, we encourage you to remain vigilant against scams.

Here are a few tips we hope you'll find helpful as you navigate through the ongoing pandemic:



- Always consult a licensed medical professional to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment.
- Make sure your doctor has been approved to administer the vaccine.
- Do not buy COVID-19 vaccines or treatments over the internet.
- Do not buy COVID-19 vaccines or treatments through an online pharmacy.
- Ignore large, unsolicited offers for vaccinations and miracle treatments or cures.
- Don't respond to text messages, emails or calls about vaccines and treatments.
- Be wary of ads for vaccines and treatments on social media.
- Any suspicious activity can be reported to:  
**[covid19investigations@dhs.gov](mailto:covid19investigations@dhs.gov)**

# PREPARING FOR WINTER CONDITIONS ON THE ROAD AND AT HOME



Here are a few quick tips to keep you and your family safe this winter:

The best thing you can do during a winter storm is stay off the roads. But

if you must travel, make sure you:

- Clear snow and ice from your vehicle, including the roof, hood, and trunk.
- Don't pass a snowplow or spreader unless it's absolutely necessary.
- Keep a safe distance behind other vehicles and trucks that are plowing.
- Park off the street if possible, to facilitate plowing.

While at home:

- If you heat with a fireplace or woodstove, have it checked by a professional and/or cleaned.
- Never plug space heaters into extension cords, keep them 3 feet from other objects, and always turn them off before going to bed.
- Keep a battery-powered or hand-crank radio in the case of power outages.
- Don't use candles during power outages.
- Make a family emergency plan so you know where your family members can reunite if you are separated during a storm.

# VSA'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

This year the Virginia Sheriffs' Association (VSA) will work with members of the 2021 Virginia General Assembly to focus on issues that help promote public safety and criminal justice in the Commonwealth. The 2021 General Assembly session will be extremely important because the sheriffs need to send a strong law and order message. The sheriffs will be fighting to preserve the rule of law, to enhance public safety, and to instill respect for our law enforcement officers.

Among our top legislative priorities in the 2021 General Assembly for the upcoming session are pay raises for deputies; ensuring law enforcement officers continue to be excluded from a citizen review board, which would be in conflict with the voting public; and continuing to defeat the end to qualified immunity for law enforcement. Qualified immunity is an appropriate protection for law enforcement officers to protect their homes and save taxpayer dollars for defending frivolous lawsuits. This troublesome bill was stopped in the special session that ended in November.

During last year's special session, the General Assembly passed legislation that would allow local governments to create advisory panels that can field citizen complaints, investigate them, and issue binding disciplinary rulings. In the past, these panels offered local law enforcement input and advice but were limited to an advisory role capacity only. The legislation exempts sheriffs, because they are elected and already subject to civilian review.

Through your strong assistance, the sheriffs are able to send a strong message, and as in the past, we will show a strong engagement with the General Assembly on behalf of all the communities Virginia law enforcement officers hold.

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## WINTER PET SAFETY

Pets left outside in extremely cold temperatures are at risk of hypothermia, frostbite, and even death.

According to the Virginia Veterinary Centers, "dogs with long, thick coats are better able to withstand cold temperatures for longer. Pets with short hair, puppies, and kittens and senior pets should not be left out in the cold for longer than a few minutes."

Here are a few tips to keep your pets safe from cold temperatures: When you bring your pets inside, wipe off their paws, which could have salt, anti-freeze, and other chemicals on them. The best thing you can do in cold temperatures is to bring your pet inside your home where they can access heat, and never leave your pet unattended in a car during cold temperatures.

If you see a dog or cat left out in cold temperatures without shelter or food, it's important to report what you see, write down as many details or record what you witness, and then contact your local animal control agency or your local sheriff's office and present your complaint and evidence.



## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VSA AND VSI?

The proceeds supporting the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute (VSI) are used exclusively for the many training and educational programs held each year and our annual scholarship program, of which we are very proud. All contributions to the VSI are tax deductible.

The Virginia Sheriffs' Association (VSA) is an organization established to represent the interests of sheriffs and law enforcement before the General Assembly in Virginia. It is a professional trade association of which contributions are not tax deductible.

## UNCLAIMED PROPERTY VIRTUAL EVENT

On October 29, 2020, the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute (VSI) and the Virginia Department of the Treasury held a virtual call-in event for VSI members to provide an opportunity to track down unclaimed property. During the event, over \$94,000 in unclaimed property was uncovered for VSI members!

## VIRGINIANS ENCOURAGED TO WEAR MASKS

With the coronavirus still impacting communities in Virginia and all around the world, Virginians are encouraged to still wear face coverings whenever social distancing is not possible. VSI supports the Virginia Department of Health and Centers of Disease Control recommendations for helping to mitigate the spread of coronavirus. Please stay safe and follow local health guidelines.



# PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM VSI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN W. JONES



On behalf of everyone here at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute, I hope you and your family had a joyous and safe holiday season — and you're off to a great start in the New Year.

If you're like most of us, then you were pleased to bid 2020 a hearty farewell. It was a challenging and unprecedented year to say

the least. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our top priority has been and will continue to be keeping the public safe. Here at VSI, we continue to be inspired by the sacrifices you and your families have made during this difficult time.

We look forward to your partnership in the year ahead as we work to protect and serve our communities. At the same time, we remain focused on continuing to bring much-needed attention to improving the working conditions of our hardworking deputy sheriffs and enhancing the criminal justice system to deal with the ever-increasing challenges faced by law enforcement, the courts, and correctional system.

I hope you find the information included in your newsletter helpful and informative. Please feel free to pass on the newsletter to family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. It is my privilege to serve as Executive Director of VSI, and I urge you to contact your sheriff's office if you have any questions about the subjects we discuss in this issue of the VSI newsletter, or any other concerns about crime prevention or public safety efforts in your community.

Thanks for all you do as a loyal supporter of the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute — and Happy New Year!

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

## PEDESTRIAN DEATHS RISING

Virginia is just one of many states that have seen a rapid uptick in pedestrian deaths over the past ten years.

Despite an overall decline in traffic deaths over the past half century, the Governors Highway Safety Association found that between 2009 and 2018 the number of pedestrian fatalities increased by 53 percent. According to Drive Smart Virginia, last year 126 pedestrians and 13 bicyclists were killed on Virginia's roadways.

Several factors are behind this spike, including bigger, deadlier vehicles. Americans have been steadily buying SUVs and heavy-duty trucks over the past few years, which pose a significantly higher threat to pedestrians than smaller vehicles.

Communities living in poverty in suburban areas that lack sidewalks and lower speed limits are at a higher risk. It was found that poorly designed roads and high speed limits are another factor that has contributed to the dramatic rise in pedestrian deaths.

Law enforcement in your community are working to educate citizens about how to stay safe on our roadways. Remember to always look out for and yield to pedestrians, slow down or be prepared to stop when turning into a crosswalk, obey speed limits, refrain from driving impaired or driving distracted, and be extra cautious when backing up.

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## SCHOLARSHIPS NOW AVAILABLE

One of the many benefits the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute offers is our scholarship program. This award — which is funded by generous VSI supporters like you — is granted to full-time or part-time students majoring in criminal justice and attending a Virginia state college or university.

In fact, we awarded 68 scholarships for the 2020-2021 school year to Virginia's youth. A link to the application and a full list of application materials can be found on our website at: <https://vasheriffsinstitute.org/scholarship/>. Applications are due May 1, 2021.

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.