



# Newsletter

Spring Edition 2024



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MAY IS



# OLDER AMERICANS - MONTH -





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


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**MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH**



Each year on May 1, we celebrate Older Americans Month and recognize the extraordinary contributions of older Americans across the nation. This year the theme for Older Americans Month is *Powered by Connection*, which recognizes the profound impact that meaningful relationships and social connections have on the health and well-being of older citizens.

This is a particularly important theme given the correlation between poor health and social isolation, especially for seniors. Feeling connected to one's community can promote overall well-being and help one avoid loneliness or other similar issues.

According to the National Institutes of Health, studies show that loneliness and social isolation are associated with higher risks for health problems such as heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline.

That is why it is so important for all of us to help maintain healthy and engaging relationships with our family members, friends, co-workers, fellow church members, and neighbors. When we sustain meaningful relationships and stay active in your community it can provide a host of benefits, not the least of which is good physical and mental health.

There are lots of ways to stay connected, including calling your friends and loved ones, scheduling regular visits with them, learning something new by taking a class, considering adopting a pet, joining a gym or community center, finding a faith-based organization, volunteering with a cause you are interested in, visiting your local library, or just getting to know your neighbors if you do not already.

**ROLE OF ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS**

The governing body of each county or city in Virginia shall employ animal control officers. When in uniform or upon displaying a badge or other credentials of office, animal control officers shall have the power to issue a summons or obtain a felony warrant as necessary. Animal control officers can be sworn officers employed by the sheriff's office. Animal control officers are charged with the enforcement of all Virginia state and local laws pertaining to the welfare, care, and control of all domestic animals. These laws describe the requirements for ownership and care of animals, as well as offenses involving animals.

Animal control officers investigate all animal complaints including neglect and cruelty to animals. They also investigate thousands of calls for service each year and implement and release domestic animal quarantines.

More specifically, these duties include:

- Picking up stray, vicious, diseased, injured, or sick animals.
- Investigating animal bite reports, and quarantining animals who have bitten someone.
- Investigating animal cruelty cases, complaints of excessive barking by dogs, and wildlife-related cases and issues.
- Issuing summonses for animal-related violations that are witnessed by the officer.
- Maintaining accurate records on all impounded animals and returning lost domestic animals to their rightful owners.
- Placing unclaimed companion animals with people who wish to adopt them.

While animal control officers are legally authorized to issue citations and take cases to court, the primary focus is on working with community residents to assist them in providing better care for their pets and observing the laws.



**National Peace Officers Memorial Day:** On May 15, we remember and honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice or have been injured while serving in the law enforcement profession.

## THESE NEW LAWS ARE BARELY A YEAR OLD

As you know, each year the Virginia General Assembly passes a number of bills that are then signed into law by the governor. You may be unaware of some of these new laws which did not receive a lot of attention in the media.

That is why we thought it would be helpful to highlight a few of these important laws passed in last year's legislature that went into effect last summer. In our next *VSI Newsletter*, we will inform you about legislation that ends up passing in this year's General Assembly.

- **House Bill 1583:** This law prohibits people from knowingly using an “unmanned aircraft system to secretly or furtively peep, spy, or attempt to peep or spy into or through a window, door, or other aperture of any building.”
- **Senate Bill 1188:** Anyone who manufactures or distributes any substance with a detectable amount of fentanyl can be charged with the Class 4 felony of using a weapon of terrorism.
- **House Bill 1673:** Impeding the blood circulation or respiration of a person by blocking or impeding the airway is a Class 6 felony if it results in bodily injury.
- **House Bill 1572:** Anyone making a phony 911 call or otherwise prompting an emergency response is a Class 1 misdemeanor. However, if someone dies during the emergency response as a result of the call, the person who made the false communication can be charged with a Class 5 or Class 6 felony.
- **House Bill 2330:** Assault and battery against public transportation workers is now a Class 1 misdemeanor, and prohibits the perpetrator from using the transit system for at least six months after conviction.
- **Senate Bill 1069:** Drivers are required to stop when approaching a pedestrian who is crossing the highway, rather than the current requirement of yielding.
- **Senate Bill 855:** In Virginia, it is now against the law to make aftermarket modifications to make a headlight appear as a blue light, on a car, motorcycle, bike, motorized skateboard, or other transportation device.
- **House Bill 2317:** Virginians serving jury duty will now receive \$50 per day, up from \$30.

or local, state, and federal peace officers who  
ine of duty.

## DON'T GET DISTRACTED



According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, more than 3,000 people lost their lives in 2021 due to distracted driving. With fatalities on the rise involving distracted drivers, we thought this would be a good time to remind our readers about the importance of setting the phone down and focusing on driving when you are behind the wheel. After all, April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month!

Some examples of distracted driving include texting while driving, talking on the phone, playing music loudly, adjusting the radio, talking to someone in the car, eating, putting on makeup, smoking, using alcohol or drugs, and sleep deprivation.

### Here are some tips provided by the DMV:

- Adjust your seat, mirrors, radio, and GPS before you start to drive. Ask passengers to help you once you hit the road.
- Shut off your cell phone or place it out of reach. If you need to make a call or send a text, safely pull over and park your vehicle.
- Do not eat, apply makeup, or engage in other behaviors that take your focus off the road.
- Secure your pets. It is safer for them and you.

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. During this important month, we want to focus attention on the growing mental health crisis in Virginia and continue to raise awareness with our elected officials about the urgent need to adequately address this public health emergency.

There are thousands of Virginians who are currently living with a mental illness. Unfortunately, Virginia's current mental health system is overwhelmed and failing to meet the needs of Virginians who are suffering from a mental health illness.

The past failure to adequately invest in mental health care has put enormous strain on law enforcement and first responders. That is why VSI fully supports efforts to ensure Virginia sheriffs and deputy sheriffs have the resources and training they need to help address the ongoing challenges posed by this growing crisis.

As a reminder, Virginia now has a mental health crisis hotline. **By dialing 988, callers will be connected to mental health counselors and mental health services.**

The 988 dispatchers can direct the caller to local resources based on their area code. The hotline will help limit the amount of mental health emergency calls that 911 receives while ensuring callers can access rapid access to mental health assistance.

# A Message From VSI Executive Director John W. Jones



On behalf of all of us at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute (VSI), I hope you are excited to welcome the return of spring to the Commonwealth of Virginia and enjoy all of the amazing outdoor activities our state has to offer!

At a time when sheriff's offices are facing extraordinary challenges, including ongoing staffing shortages, we are so

grateful for your interest and concern about law enforcement in our state. Of course, it is your staunch support that enables us to develop and sustain programs and policies that are vital to keeping our families and communities safe.

With your continued strong support, VSI will work to promote crime prevention and public safety efforts in your community and all across Virginia during this spring season. At the same time, VSI is focused on continuing to bring much-needed attention to the ongoing issue of law enforcement retention and improving the working conditions of our hardworking deputy sheriffs.

I want you to know 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 concerns about crime prevention or law enforcement efforts in your community.

Thank you for your continued support!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John W. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

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

## HIKING SAFETY TIPS



Our state offers amazing parks and beautiful trails to explore that cater to everyone from the novice hiker to the most experienced outdoors person.

During these spring months, it is the perfect time to set off with your family or friends for a hike on one of our state's many beautiful trails.

Here are a few safety tips to keep in mind, courtesy of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation:

- Let someone know where you are going.
- Hike early in the day. Temperatures can easily be 20-25 degrees cooler in the morning than in the afternoon. The day will cool off toward sunset, but temperatures will still be hotter than in the morning.
- Keep your phone in airplane mode to save the battery and bring a portable charger. This is your way to try to reach someone in case of an emergency, though signals can be sketchy in remote areas.
- Pay attention to weather forecasts noting the hourly temperature predictions for where you are hiking.
- Begin to hydrate a couple of hours before hiking.
- Drink frequently. Instead of guzzling lots of water all at once, take smaller and more frequent sips.
- Eat snacks with salt. Salt in foods can help restore sodium levels in the bloodstream. Snack frequently on salty foods, such as nuts, pretzels, and trail mix.
- Stay on the trail. Snakes prefer places to hide and hunt. If you see one on a trail, simply stay back.
- Wear insect repellent. Always check for ticks after a day in the outdoors.

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## BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU GIVES VSI 100% CHARITY ACCOUNTABILITY RATING

Once again, the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute (VSI) has met all twenty standards of charity accountability of the Better Business Bureau (BBB). This status applies through February 2026. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability were developed to assist donors in making sound giving decisions and to foster public confidence in charitable organizations.

The standards seek to encourage fair and honest solicitation practices, to promote ethical conduct by charitable organizations and to advance support of philanthropy. VSI's report is accessible using the following link: <https://give.org/charity-reviews/national/Police-and-Firefighter-Organizations/Virginia-Sheriffs-Institute-in-Richmond-va-52753>.