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**HOUSE BILL NO. 2350**

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 8, 2025

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 44-146.18 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding sections numbered 44-146.18:10 and 44-146.18:11, relating to Department of Emergency Management; powers and duties; development and implementation of standardized guidelines and training programs.*

Patrons—Gardner, Clark, Henson and Martinez

Referred to Committee on Public Safety

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That § 44-146.18 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding sections numbered 44-146.18:10 and 44-146.18:11 as follows:**

**§ 44-146.18. Department of Emergency Management; administration and operational control; coordinator and other personnel; powers and duties.**

A. The State Office of Emergency Services is continued and shall hereafter be known as the Department of Emergency Management (the Department). Wherever the words "State Department of Emergency Services" are used in any law of the Commonwealth, they shall mean the Department of Emergency Management. During a declared emergency this Department shall revert to the operational control of the Governor. The Department shall have a coordinator who shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor and also serve as State Emergency Planning Director. The Department shall employ the professional, technical, secretarial, and clerical employees necessary for the performance of its functions.

B. The Department shall in the administration of emergency services and disaster preparedness programs:

1. In coordination with political subdivisions and state agencies, ensure that the Commonwealth has up-to-date assessments and preparedness plans to prevent, respond to, and recover from all disasters including acts of terrorism;

2. Conduct a statewide emergency management assessment in cooperation with political subdivisions, private industry, and other public and private entities deemed vital to preparedness, public safety, and security. The assessment shall include a review of emergency response plans, which include the variety of hazards, natural and man-made. The assessment shall be updated annually;

3. Promulgate plans and programs that are conducive to adequate disaster mitigation preparedness, response, and recovery programs;

4. Prepare and maintain a State Emergency Operations Plan for disaster response and recovery operations that assigns primary and support responsibilities for basic emergency services functions to state agencies, organizations, and personnel as appropriate;

5. Coordinate and administer disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery plans and programs with the proponent federal, state, and local government agencies and related groups;

6. Provide guidance and assistance to state agencies and units of local government in developing and maintaining emergency management and continuity of operations (COOP) programs, plans, and systems;

7. Make necessary recommendations to agencies of the federal, state, or local governments on preventive and preparedness measures designed to eliminate or reduce disasters and their impact;

8. Determine requirements of the Commonwealth and its political subdivisions for those necessities needed in the event of a declared emergency which are not otherwise readily available;

9. Assist state agencies and political subdivisions in establishing and operating training programs and programs of public information and education regarding emergency services and disaster preparedness activities;

10. Consult with the Board of Education regarding the development and revision of a model school crisis and emergency management plan for the purpose of assisting public schools in establishing, operating, and maintaining emergency services and disaster preparedness activities;

11. Consult with the State Council of Higher Education in the development and revision of a model institutional crisis and emergency management plan for the purpose of assisting public and private two-year and four-year institutions of higher education in establishing, operating, and maintaining emergency services and disaster preparedness activities and, as needed, in developing an institutional crisis and emergency management plan pursuant to § 23.1-804;

12. Develop standards, provide guidance, and encourage the maintenance of local and state agency emergency operations plans, which shall include the requirement for a provision that the Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Virginia Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund be contacted immediately to

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59 deploy assistance in the event of an emergency as defined in the emergency response plan when there are  
60 victims as defined in § 19.2-11.01. The Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Virginia Criminal  
61 Injuries Compensation Fund shall be the lead coordinating agencies for those individuals determined to be  
62 victims, and the plan shall also contain current contact information for both agencies;

63 13. Prepare, maintain, coordinate, or implement emergency resource management plans and programs  
64 with federal, state, and local government agencies and related groups, and make such surveys of industries,  
65 resources, and facilities within the Commonwealth, both public and private, as are necessary to carry out the  
66 purposes of this chapter;

67 14. Coordinate with the federal government and any public or private agency or entity in achieving any  
68 purpose of this chapter and in implementing programs for disaster prevention, mitigation, preparation,  
69 response, and recovery;

70 15. Establish guidelines pursuant to § 44-146.28, and administer payments to eligible applicants as  
71 authorized by the Governor;

72 16. Coordinate and be responsible for the receipt, evaluation, and dissemination of emergency services  
73 intelligence pertaining to all probable hazards affecting the Commonwealth;

74 17. Coordinate intelligence activities relating to terrorism with the Department of State Police;

75 18. Develop an emergency response plan to address the needs of individuals with household pets and  
76 service animals in the event of a disaster and assist and coordinate with local agencies in developing an  
77 emergency response plan for household pets and service animals; ~~and~~

78 19. Establish and maintain an Emergency Management Equity Working Group (the Working Group) to  
79 ensure that emergency management programs and plans provide support to at-risk individuals and  
80 populations disproportionately impacted by disasters. The Working Group shall include experts from (i) the  
81 Governor's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and other state agencies; (ii) the public at large; and (iii)  
82 the private sector who have expertise related to at-risk and vulnerable populations and the threats faced by  
83 such populations during a disaster;

84 20. *Consult with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services regarding the*  
85 *development of standardized guidelines for mental health support during an emergency or extended incident.*  
86 *Such guidelines shall, among other things, (i) define "extended incident," (ii) establish protocols for*  
87 *identifying and addressing mental health concerns, (iii) provide access to mental health professionals, and*  
88 *(iv) incorporate flexible options to alleviate stress and work-related exhaustion and burnout connected to the*  
89 *emergency or extended incident; and*

90 21. *Develop a model document for use by state agencies outlining relevant roles and responsibilities of*  
91 *policy makers, agency heads, key personnel within the Incident Command System (ICS) deployed by the state,*  
92 *and the role of the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST).*

93 The Department of Emergency Management shall ensure that all such plans, assessments, and programs  
94 required by this subsection include specific preparedness for, and response to, disasters resulting from  
95 electromagnetic pulses and geomagnetic disturbances.

96 C. The Department of Emergency Management shall during a period of impending emergency or declared  
97 emergency be responsible for:

98 1. The receipt, evaluation, and dissemination of intelligence pertaining to an impending or actual disaster;

99 2. Providing facilities from which state agencies and supporting organizations may conduct emergency  
100 operations;

101 3. Providing an adequate communications and warning system capable of notifying all political  
102 subdivisions in the Commonwealth of an impending disaster within a reasonable time;

103 4. Establishing and maintaining liaison with affected political subdivisions;

104 5. Determining requirements for disaster relief and recovery assistance;

105 6. Coordinating disaster response actions of federal, state and volunteer relief agencies; and

106 7. Coordinating and providing guidance and assistance to affected political subdivisions to ensure orderly  
107 and timely response to and recovery from disaster effects.

108 D. The Department of Emergency Management shall be provided the necessary facilities and equipment  
109 needed to perform its normal day-to-day activities and coordinate disaster-related activities of the various  
110 federal, state, and other agencies during a state of emergency declaration by the Governor or following a  
111 major disaster declaration by the President.

112 E. The Department of Emergency Management is authorized to enter into all contracts and agreements  
113 necessary or incidental to performance of any of its duties stated in this section or otherwise assigned to it by  
114 law, including contracts with the United States, other states, agencies and government subdivisions of the  
115 Commonwealth, and other appropriate public and private entities.

116 F. The Department of Emergency Management shall encourage private industries whose goods and  
117 services are deemed vital to the public good to provide annually updated preparedness assessments to the  
118 local coordinator of emergency management on or before April 1 of each year, to facilitate overall  
119 Commonwealth preparedness. For the purposes of this section, "private industry" means companies, private

120 hospitals, and other businesses or organizations deemed by the State Coordinator of Emergency Management  
121 to be essential to the public safety and well-being of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

122 G. The Department of Emergency Management shall establish a Coordinator of Search and Rescue.  
123 Powers and duties of the Coordinator shall include:

- 124 1. Coordinating the search and rescue function of the Department of Emergency Management;
- 125 2. Coordinating with local, state, and federal agencies involved in search and rescue;
- 126 3. Coordinating the activities of search and rescue organizations involved in search and rescue;
- 127 4. Maintaining a register of search and rescue certifications, training, and responses;
- 128 5. Establishing a memorandum of understanding with the Virginia Search and Rescue Council and its  
129 respective member agencies regarding search and rescue efforts;
- 130 6. Providing on-scene search and rescue coordination when requested by an authorized person;
- 131 7. Providing specialized search and rescue training to police, fire-rescue, EMS, emergency managers,  
132 volunteer search and rescue responders, and others who might have a duty to respond to a search and rescue  
133 emergency;
- 134 8. Gathering and maintaining statistics on search and rescue in the Commonwealth;
- 135 9. Compiling, maintaining, and making available an inventory of search and rescue resources available in  
136 the Commonwealth; and
- 137 10. Periodically reviewing search and rescue cases and developing best professional practices.

138 Nothing in this chapter shall be construed as authorizing the Department of Emergency Management to  
139 take direct operational responsibilities from local, state, or federal law enforcement in the course of search  
140 and rescue or missing person cases.

141 **§ 44-146.18:10. Development of training course on certain emergency management-related principles;**  
142 **mandatory training for agency heads; required state agency document.**

143 A. The Department of Emergency Management shall develop a training course comprised of National  
144 Incident Management System (NIMS) principles, the state's Incident Command System (ICS) structure, and  
145 the role of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Each agency head shall be required to complete the  
146 training course within six months of appointment and again every two years thereafter.

147 B. Each state agency shall develop and update every two years a document outlining relevant roles and  
148 responsibilities of policy makers, agency heads, key personnel within the ICS deployed by the state, and the  
149 role of the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST).

150 **§ 44-146.18:11. Department training and support; Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST).**

151 A. The Department of Emergency Management shall offer health and safety training to volunteer  
152 organizations that have been incorporated into the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST).

153 B. The Department of Emergency Management shall develop a health monitoring system for volunteers  
154 incorporated in VEST for implementation during a declared state of emergency.