



# **Safe Haven Initiative Information Kit for Local Departments of Social Services November 2023**





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## Introduction

### *Overview of Virginia's Safe Haven Laws*

In Virginia, Safe Haven laws allow a parent to safely surrender their unharmed infant who is 30 days old or younger, to a staff member at a designated Safe Haven location: a hospital that provides 24-hr emergency services, an attended emergency medical services (EMS) agency that employs emergency medical personnel such as some fire stations and rescue squads, or a newborn safety device located at and operated by such hospital or emergency medical services agency.

The laws provide protection from criminal and civil liability for parents who safely relinquish their infants. The laws allow a parent to claim an affirmative defense to prosecution if the prosecution is based solely on the parent having left the infant at a designated Safe Haven location within the first 30 days of the infant's life. For the affirmative defense to apply, the infant must be delivered in a manner reasonably calculated to ensure the infant's safety.

Additionally, Safe Haven laws provide hospital and emergency medical services personnel criminal and civil immunity for injury or other damages to the infant unless such injury or other damage to the infant was the result of gross negligence or willful misconduct by such personnel.

### *Safe Haven Legislation*

During the 2022 General Assembly session, legislation was passed that required VDSS to establish a 24-hour toll-free Safe Haven hotline. In October 2022, the National Safe Haven Alliance (NSHA) began providing that service for VDSS. In addition to the hotline, VDSS was required to undertake a campaign to promote the toll-free hotline and to increase awareness of the Commonwealth's laws providing for relinquishment of an infant, relinquishment locations, and support and resources for parents and the public. Once again, VDSS partnered with NSHA to produce the promotional materials needed for the Safe Haven public awareness campaign.

### *National Safe Haven Alliance*

NSHA's mission is to provide oversight and support to all states and territories to prevent infant abandonment across the country. For over 15 years, NSHA has helped more than 4,000 parents with relinquishment, as the leading Safe Haven expert. To learn more about our partner, NSHA, please visit <https://www.nationalsafehavenalliance.org/>.



## Safe Haven Initiative

VDSS, in consultation with NSHA, determined the development of a Safe Haven Initiative would be the most proactive and expeditious way to comply with the legislative requirements set forth in 2022 to increase awareness about Virginia's Safe Haven laws, relinquishment locations, and support and resources for parents and the public. The Safe Haven Initiative, as opposed to a large-scale state-driven awareness campaign, provides materials and resources for local departments to use in a way that will be most meaningful to each respective community.

### *Initiative Objectives*

- Raise awareness about Virginia's Safe Haven laws and the existence of the 24-hour Safe Haven crisis hotline.
- Provide resources for LDSS and designated Safe Haven locations.
- Engage community partners.
- Prevent infant endangerment due to abandonment in unsafe locations.

### *Initiative Materials*

To create the materials for the initiative, NSHA adapted their existing copyrighted resource and training materials to reflect Virginia's Safe Haven laws.

- Public Service Announcement (PSA)—Brief video providing an overview of Virginia's Safe Haven laws and the Safe Haven crisis hotline (approximately 5 minutes).
- NSHA Hotline Video—Informational clip about the Safe Haven crisis hotline (approximately 30 seconds).
- Virginia Safe Haven Training Video—An interactive training module that covers Virginia's Safe Haven laws, approved Safe Haven locations, best practices for Safe Haven providers, and rights of surrendering parents (approximately 30 minutes).
- Safe Haven Posters—Information for parents about options, resources, and Virginia's Safe Haven laws.
- Pregnancy Help Cards—Information for pregnant people on the services and resources offered by NSHA.
- Billboards—Information for parents about Safe Haven in Virginia with contact information for the Safe Haven crisis hotline.
- Safe Haven Designated Location Signs—Exterior signs that label the building as a designated Safe Haven location.
- Printed Safe Haven Toolkit—Printed copies of the Virginia-specific NSHA brochure, Virginia-specific NSHA posters in English and Spanish, Virginia-specific Pregnancy Help Cards in English and Spanish, and a Safe Haven for Providers Virginia-specific flyer.



- Digital Safe Haven Toolkit—Electronic links to the PSA, NSHA Hotline video, the Virginia-specific NSHA brochure, Virginia-specific NSHA posters in English and Spanish, Virginia-specific Pregnancy Help Cards in English and Spanish, Safe Haven for Providers Virginia-specific flyer, and the Virginia Safe Haven training video.

### *How to Use the Materials*

- Printed Safe Haven Toolkit—Each local department of social services (LDSS) will receive one printed toolkit directly from NSHA. The LDSS should distribute the printed materials included in the toolkit throughout their community, in their agency lobby, and other locations highly visible to the public.
- Digital Safe Haven Toolkit—Each LDSS should utilize the digital materials in the toolkit to share information on their agency webpage, County/City webpage, and on agency and County/City social media platforms. These items should also be shared with community partners.
- Virginia Safe Haven Training Video—Each LDSS should share the training video with community partners and designated Safe Haven providers. Collaboration is encouraged with health systems, birthing hospitals, and fire and emergency services agencies in each community.
- Safe Haven Designated Location Signs—NSHA will provide 100 exterior signs at no cost to designated Safe Haven locations across the Commonwealth. Each LDSS should encourage the Safe Haven locations in their community to order an exterior sign directly from NSHA: <https://www.nationalsafehavenalliance.org/signage> The Safe Haven location will need to select “other” as the method of payment when they place their order.
- Billboards—One billboard will be placed in each region for three months. Billboards will be located in Norfolk, New River Valley, Abingdon, Warrenton, and Richmond. Each LDSS should highlight the placement of the billboard within their region in their community.

## LDSS’ Role in Safe Haven Initiative

LDSS serve as key leaders in their communities by ensuring children and families have access to valuable resources and supports within their communities. By participating in this initiative, the LDSS will ensure children, families, and community partners have pertinent information about Virginia’s Safe Haven laws and available resources.



## Technical Assistance

VDSS Protection Program staff and the Regional Protection Practice Consultants are available to provide technical assistance to the LDSS regarding the Safe Haven Initiative.

## Preparations for Launch of Safe Haven Initiative

- Protection Program presented briefly on Virginia's Safe Haven laws and announced that the initiative was underway during the in-person Family and Children's Trust Fund meeting on 03/01/23.
- Protection Program discussed plans for the initiative during a collaboration meeting with representatives from Virginia Department of Health on 03/09/23.
- Protection Program provided an overview of Virginia's Safe Haven laws and announced that the initiative was underway during the Division of Family Services Parent Advisory Council meeting on 04/18/23.
- Protection Program discussed the plans for the initiative during the CPS/Hotline team meeting on 06/22/23.
- Protection Program provided a brief overview of the initiative during the Regional Director/Protection/Prevention/Hotline meeting on 08/01/23.
- Protection Program presented on the initiative during the Director's Coffee Break on 08/02/23.
- Protection Program provided a brief overview of Virginia's Safe Haven laws, the initiative and contact information for NSHA during the monthly Hotline Supervisors meeting on 08/21/23.
- Protection Program presented on Virginia's Safe Haven laws and the initiative during the Prevention/Protection/Hotline PAC meeting on 10/03/23.
- Protection Program provided an update on the initiative during the CPS/Prevention Team Regional Call on 10/10/23.
- Protection Program emailed Regional Directors on 10/18/23.
- Director of Family Services emailed LDSS Directors on 10/19/23.
- Protection Program published a broadcast on 10/30/23.
- Protection Program created a power point presentation for the Practice Consultants to use at their November Supervisor meeting on 10/31/23.



## Email Template for Community Partners

VDSS developed an email template for the LDSS to use when sharing information from the Safe Haven Toolkit with community partners.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We are writing to inform you that the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) has officially launched the *Safe Haven Initiative*. The *Safe Haven Initiative* is a collaborative partnership between VDSS and the National Safe Haven Alliance designed to raise awareness about Virginia's Safe Haven laws and provide resources for parents and community partners.

*In Virginia, the Safe Haven laws allow a parent to safely surrender their unharmed infant who is 30 days old or younger to a staff member at a designated Safe Haven location (a hospital that provides 24-hour emergency services, an attended Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agency that employs emergency medical personnel such as some fire stations or rescue squads or a newborn safety device located at and operated by such hospital or emergency medical services agency). The laws provide protection from criminal and civil liability for parents who safely relinquish their infants. The laws allow a parent to claim an affirmative defense to prosecution if the prosecution is based solely on the parent having left the infant at a designated Safe Haven location within the first 30 days of the infant's life. For the affirmative defense to apply, the infant must be delivered in a manner reasonably calculated to ensure the infant's safety.*

As a key community partner, we wanted to share the Safe Haven Initiative Digital Toolkit with you. You may access the digital toolkit by clicking [here](#). The digital toolkit is designed to provide information about Virginia's Safe Haven laws and resources for parents and community partners. We kindly ask you share the materials in the digital toolkit with your staff, on social media platforms, on agency websites, and with other organizations/agencies in your network. Additionally, printed materials from the toolkit can be obtained by contacting the National Safe Haven Alliance at <https://www.nationalsafehavenalliance.org/> or by calling [1-888-510-BABY\(2229\)](tel:1-888-510-BABY(2229)).

Thank you in advance for helping prevent the abandonment of infants in unsafe locations.

Sincerely,

LDSS Point of Contact



## Conclusion

Virginia's Safe Haven laws provide a protective refuge for infants that otherwise might be abandoned in an unsafe manner. Creating awareness of Safe Haven laws and accessibility to designated Safe Haven locations is important as these locations provide a protected and regulated process for parents who feel it is best to surrender their infants.

VDSS appreciates your partnership in sharing the information in the toolkits to help raise awareness around Virginia's Safe Haven laws and the existence of the 24-hour Safe Haven hotline.

For more information on Virginia's Safe Haven laws and resources, and information on how to order additional materials, please visit the Safe Haven Resources webpage on the public site by clicking [here](#) or the CPS Resources and Job Aids webpage on FUSION by clicking [here](#).