



Virginia Association of First Responders Unites Guardians of the Community *Fire, law enforcement & EMS agencies share one voice, one family, one mission*

Oilville, Va. (Jan. 21, 2026) – The Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads, founded in 1935, is proud to announce that the organization has a new name, the **Virginia Association of First Responders (VAFR)**, and a more inclusive mission: To support and empower every emergency medical technician, firefighter and law enforcement officer across the Commonwealth.

This rebrand reflects the increased growth and collaboration of statewide entities that serve in first responder capacities in communities throughout Virginia.

As the united voice of the state’s first responders, the VAFR connects responders, agencies and communities to strengthen public safety, advocate for needs at the General Assembly by serving on state advisory boards, and drive change through strategic partnerships. Currently, over 350 fire, law enforcement and EMS agencies hold memberships in the VAFR, representing 22,000-plus individuals involved in first responder professions.

“The new name highlights our shared commitment to training, advocacy and community,” said Edward “Bubby” Bish, Jr., Executive Director of the Virginia Association of First Responders. “We have talked about the concept of coming together for several years. With recent changes in state regulations regarding training, we saw a great need to join forces in a more coordinated way.”

“I’m so proud that these organizations are working together as a unified group on one team with one voice,” said Wayne Hoover, Fire Chief of Petersburg Fire Department. “This is a new era for Virginia’s first responders, and the change has reignited our organization. The VAFR ties fire, law enforcement and EMS together and uses that strength to benefit all first responders in Virginia.”

A significant aspect of the VAFR’s mission involves delivering high-quality training, education and professional development to support agency readiness and to strengthen first responders whenever and wherever they are called to serve. Over 25 statewide training programs are offered

free to VAFR member organizations, meaning that any of the individuals in that member agency can attend a VAFR training program at no charge.

From June 12-21, 2026, the VAFR will host the **1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium** in Blacksburg with nine days of specialized training on a variety of tracks including all types of rescue operations as well as pediatric EMS, becoming a public safety chaplain, mental health resiliency and more. Details about the Symposium, which typically draws hundreds of participants each year, will be available in February at vafr.org.

“We offer technical training programs in extrication from a car, farm machinery and a school bus, as well as swift water and rope rescue courses and many more,” said Jeff Grimm, VAFR Vice President and Major and Chief Deputy for Bath County Sheriff’s Office. “A new drone operations program is being developed that is FAA approved. There’s even administrative training for agencies that need assistance with writing by-laws or grants. The VAFR’s training is second to none and we revamp it every year to keep the programs relevant and up-to-date. VAFR has the resources to help first responder agencies be successful.”

“This transition to the Virginia Association of First Responders honors our past and ensures our legacy will continue for another 90 years and beyond,” Bish concluded. “It’s a win-win for everyone, because fire, law enforcement and EMS are all one family with the same mission – to protect and serve Virginia.”

If any first responder organization in Virginia needs assistance, contact vafr@vafr.org. To learn more about the VAFR and its offerings, visit vafr.org.

###

Media Contacts:

Sara Hunt, Public Relations Coordinator, SaraHuntPR@gmail.com, 804-994-1120

Edward “Bubby” Bish, Jr., Executive Director of VAFR, bubbybish@vafr.org, 804-731-1131