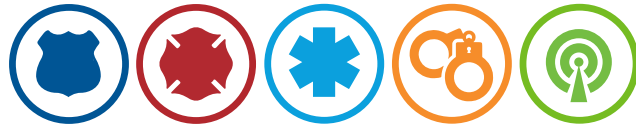


VIRGINIA



FIRST RESPONDER **WELLNESS**

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services – Office of First Responder Wellness

2025 FIRST RESPONDER WELLNESS CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 10–12, 2025

**HILTON NORFOLK THE MAIN
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA**



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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Criminal Justice Services

The Honorable Jackson H. Miller
Director

Tracy Louise Winn Banks, Esq.
Chief Deputy Director

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Richmond, Virginia 23219
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September 10, 2025

Dear Colleague:

On behalf of Governor Glenn Youngkin, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Marcus Anderson, and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), it is my pleasure to welcome you to the *2025 First Responder Wellness Conference*. The goal of this conference is to provide training and resources to law enforcement, fire, EMS, corrections, and 911 dispatchers, thus improving the effectiveness of first responders and the safety of the community.

First responders spend much of their careers supporting and assisting others in need. It can be difficult to recognize the impact of their careers on their daily lives. We realize that, as first responders, you are often exposed to harrowing events and the detrimental effects of witnessing human suffering. The daily accumulation of stress, anxiety, and trauma in your profession is rarely addressed.

DCJS is pleased to offer this two-and-a-half-day conference to provide information, resources, and training to the first responder community. Our goal is for first responder professionals to learn from experts in the field about resources and best practices while developing comprehensive health and wellness strategies.

It is my hope that the information offered here will help you focus on your own health and wellness so that you can continue improving the quality of life of the communities you serve.

DCJS appreciates your dedication to keeping the Commonwealth of Virginia safe. We hope you enjoy the conference.

With much gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jackson H. Miller".

Jackson Miller
Director

8:30 AM–9:00 AM Welcome and Opening Ceremony**Presentation of Colors and National Anthem**

Norfolk Police Honor Guard

Opening RemarksJackson Miller, *Director, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services*Eric Gowin, *Lieutenant Colonel, Virginia State Police*Mark Talbot, *Chief, Norfolk Police Department***9:00 AM–10:30 AM Leading with Grace — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E**Eric McCants, *Sergeant, Richmond County Sheriff's Office, Georgia*

Eric McCants uses the "Leading with Grace" concept daily to encourage, motivate, and push others into greatness. When you lead with grace, you will listen before speaking to clearly understand what someone is trying to tell you; stay in control of your emotions when you are discouraged to control how you respond; and be vulnerable, because there is power in admitting when you are wrong. If we highlight our success, we must also acknowledge our failures. "Leading With Grace" will help you stay in the fight, empower those around you, and encourage others to step out of their comfort zone.

10:30 AM–10:45 AM Break**10:45 AM–11:30 AM Operational Breathing: Calm, Centered and In Control — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E**Jennifer Boileau, *Founder, Jennifer Boileau Mindfulness Coaching*

First responders face intense situations that demand split-second decisions under extreme pressure—both on and off duty. This experiential session equips participants with practical, proven breathwork techniques designed to regulate the nervous system, manage acute stress, and support recovery after critical incidents. Grounded in methods used by tactical teams and emergency personnel, Operational Breathing teaches simple, field-tested practices like down-regulation techniques that can be applied in the moment or after the call. Participants will learn how to use their breath as a powerful tool to maintain composure, sharpen focus, find better sleep, and foster resilience in high-stakes environments while understanding WHY the techniques work. Whether in the middle of a crisis or recovering from cumulative stress, these breathwork skills are built for first responders, helping you stay calm, centered, and in control when it matters most.

11:30 AM–12:30 PM Lunch (provided) — 4th Floor, Main Salons FGH**12:30 PM–2:00 PM BREAKOUT SESSIONS****1. Rapid Stress Recovery Technique — 4th Floor, Main Salons DE**Scarlett Williams, *LPC, Developer, Target 2 Zero*

This session will teach first responders to boost their well-being and performance with Target 2 Zero's rapid stress reduction protocol. This easy-to-use technique offers quick stress relief in just 5 to 15 minutes, suitable for individuals and groups. Rapid stress reduction can prevent and treat PTSD symptoms with a method faster than standard EMDR.

2. Please, Help Me! A Primer to the Provider Options Found on the DCJS Virginia First Responder Wellness "Resources" Page — 4th Floor, Main Salon AKit Cummings, *Managing Director, Virginia Law Enforcement Assistance Program (VLEAP)*

This session will explore the information offered on a trusted internet source: the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) First Responder Wellness site. Clicking on the "Resources" tab on this site opens a variety of choices categorized by Public Safety disciplines. Here, you can access in-the-moment services for individuals in need, personalized evaluation tools, and guidance on formulating policy for agency peer support efforts. There are also links to sites dedicated to remembering those we have lost and ensuring an appropriate memorial. Explore each of these resources and learn about based on the needs of participants, additionally, the Virginia Law Enforcement Assistance Program will close this session with a specific review of the services they have to offer.

3. Life Beyond the Badge: Work-Life Balance for First Responders — 4th Floor, Main Salon B

Kyree Curmon, *Fitness Director, NOTA Fitness*

The demanding nature of a first responder's career often blurs the lines between work and personal life, making it challenging to maintain a healthy balance. "Life Beyond the Badge: Work-Life Balance for First Responders" is designed to help law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS personnel, corrections officers, and dispatchers develop practical strategies for managing stress, setting boundaries, and prioritizing their well-being. This session explores the unique challenges first responders face, including shift work, emotional exhaustion, and the pressure of constant readiness. Through interactive discussions and real-world scenarios, participants will learn techniques for stress reduction, time management, and improving relationships with family and friends. Additionally, the session emphasizes the importance of self-care, mindfulness, and building a support network both inside and outside the profession. By the end of this session, participants will gain actionable tools to create a sustainable work-life balance, enhance overall wellness, and maintain a fulfilling life beyond the badge.

4. Dropping the Shield — 4th Floor, Main Salon C

Kenny Mitchell, Jr., *Founder, Operation Yellow Tape*

Join Fire Lieutenant Ret. Kenny Mitchell, Jr. for a powerful and interactive workshop designed specifically for first responders and the unique challenges they face inside and outside the yellow tape. As a seasoned 21-year veteran of the fire service, he knows all too well the struggles first responders face. By sharing his own personal struggles with mental health setbacks and his signature HELP acronym, he guides participants through understanding and healing to empower them to navigate life's challenges with newfound strength and clarity.

2:00 PM–2:30 PM

Break

2:30 PM–4:00 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS**1. Dispatch Strong: Resilience and Recovery in the Comm Center — 4th Floor, Main Salons DE**

Kris Inman, MA, *RYT-200 – Director of Program Development, The Healthy Dispatcher*

This session is specialized for first responders and is designed to build mental and emotional resilience in high-pressure environments. Emergency dispatching is a demanding role that requires rapid decision-making and sustained focus, often at the expense of self-care and recovery. This session will provide practical strategies to enhance resilience, manage stress, and promote recovery in the face of ongoing challenges. Participants will learn techniques to prevent burnout, recover from high-stress situations, and maintain well-being while delivering optimal performance. Whether new to dispatch or experienced, this session offers essential tools to stay strong, balanced, and prepared for the demands of the role.

2. Thriving as a Leader: How to Employ Wellness and Resiliency as a Leader — 4th Floor, Main Salon A

Eric Gowin, *Lieutenant Colonel, Virginia State Police*

This comprehensive wellness session is specifically designed for executive-level first responders—leaders who manage high-stress environments and are responsible for the health, safety, and performance of their teams. The session combines evidence-based wellness strategies with leadership development to equip participants with tools to enhance personal resilience, foster a culture of wellness, and lead with clarity and confidence under pressure.

3. Lethal Means Safety — 4th Floor, Main Salon B

Megan Flaherty, *Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator/Suicide, Prevention, Virginia Department of Veterans Affairs*

Lethal means are objects (e.g., medications, firearms, sharp instruments) that can be used to inflict self-directed violence. Lethal Means Safety (LMS) is an intentional, voluntary practice to reduce one's suicide risk by limiting access to those lethal means. LMS focuses on ensuring time and space between a person in crisis and their access to lethal means. Participants will be able to review the *2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, and explore resources that can be used to create time and space between thought and action during times of crisis.

4. Therapy Dogs and Mindfulness: Wellness Lessons — 4th Floor, Main Salon C

Michael Gresham, *Chief Wellness Officer, Therapy K-9 Handler, Virginia State Police*

Michael Gresham will discuss the Virginia State Police (VSP) Therapy Dog Program, including the certification and utilization of therapy K-9s. He will also speak about the VSP's "Upstream Tactics" to build resilience and wellness, and how to pick the right people to work in your wellness program. In this session, he will share lessons learned throughout his involvement with the creation and duties of this program.

4:00 PM

End of Day 1

8:30 AM–10:00 AM **Situational Awareness Security: Mitigate the Threat — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E**

Bart Womack, *Command Sergeant, United States Army, Retired*

Domestic terrorism is growing at an accelerating rate in places of worship, inside corporate and government organizations, and on school campuses from elementary to university. Situational awareness is critical for survival in today's environment. Command Sergeant Major Bart E. Womack, U.S. Army (Retired), leverages lessons learned from his firsthand experience as a survivor of an active shooter insider threat attack while serving in the 101st Airborne Division. A thought leader on safety and security, he combines impactful stories, compelling research, and practical tools to inspire a comprehensive understanding of safety, empowering audiences to adopt proactive situational awareness strategies against potential threats long before the attack. This session focuses on recognizing unique characteristics and warning signs associated with insider threats, helping participants develop situational awareness and recognize behavioral indicators of potential threats while learning to mitigate these risks. Audiences will leave equipped to play an active role with a renewed commitment from a comprehensive understanding of practical, proactive strategies to create safer campuses and communities.

10:00 AM–10:30 AM **Break**

10:30 AM–11:30 AM **Caring Under Pressure: How We Treat Each Other in Public Safety — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E**

Kris Inman, MA, *RYT-200 –Director of Program Development at The Healthy Dispatcher*

Despite the extensive training in public safety, many elements of the job remain beyond our control. However, we can significantly influence areas within our reach, such as our attitude, mutual support, and how we treat each other. This session shifts focus from the uncontrollable to the impactful, emphasizing the importance of social support and belonging in an industry that urgently requires it. No amount of technical knowledge can replace the confidence that your colleagues have your back. As Theodore Roosevelt aptly stated, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This session highlights the transformative power of fostering a caring, supportive environment in public safety to enhance resilience, performance, and job satisfaction.

11:30 AM–12:30 PM **Lunch (provided) — 4th Floor, Main Salons FGH**

12:30 PM–2:00 PM **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

1. **How to Effectively Handle an Officer in Crisis — 4th Floor, Main Salons DE**

Maggie Deboard, *President and Co-Founder, Foundation for First Responder Wellness and Resiliency*

Jaysyn Carson, *Vice President and Co-Founder, Foundation for First Responder Wellness and Resiliency*

The stress of a law enforcement career, along with personal and family issues, can often lead to a crisis when coping mechanisms, resources, and support are not in place. When a crisis happens, how an agency responds is critical to saving officers' careers and ensuring the proper help is secured. This breakout session will discuss how to voluntarily get your officer to the right resource, how to secure trust and cooperation using peer resources, how to enact treatment diversion policies when behaviors are exposed in the workplace, and how to assist in managing the issue moving forward in their career.

2. **Navigating Relationship Struggles as a First Responder — 4th Floor, Main Salon A**

Kristina Moore, *Behavioral Health Coordinator, Loudoun County Fire and Rescue, Virginia*

This session explores the unique challenges that first responders face in maintaining healthy personal relationships. Participants will learn to identify the professional demands—such as shift work, trauma exposure, and high stress—that often impact relationships and personal well-being. The session will provide practical strategies to strengthen connections with loved ones, improve communication, and foster resilience. Additionally, participants will gain insights into available resources and tools to support themselves and their relationships while balancing the rigors of their professions.

3. **Re-Learn to Relax — 4th Floor, Main Salon B**

Jami Zanetta, MA, CWPM, CPT, *Wellness and Communications Consultant, Virginia Department of Human Resources – Office of Health Benefits*

In this workshop, Jami Zanetta with the Virginia Department of Human Resources will discuss CommonHealth's Guide to Meditation and Mindfulness for Busy Beginners, and the physical and mental benefits of meditation and mindfulness.

4. Turn Stress into Success with Mental Fitness Training — 4th Floor, Main Salon C

Dr. Seth Hickerson, *CEO, My Steady Mind*

Participants will revolutionize the way they think, act, and succeed. They will master the mental fitness tactics needed to overcome obstacles, boost productivity, and exceed targets with confidence and resilience. First responders will be equipped with the skills to adapt, foster resilience, and approach uncertainty with a growth mindset, ensuring they can thrive in any circumstance. This session models tactical exercises to build clarity, focus, and emotional control. It also shares strategies to conquer self-doubt and silence negative self-talk and explores practical tools for goal visualization, mindful decision-making, and sustained motivation. This workshop leaves participants feeling empowered, inspired, and ready to tackle challenges with a renewed sense of purpose and determination.

2:00 PM–2:30 PM

Break

2:30 PM–4:00 PM

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3. The Recharge Code: Beating Burnout for First Responders — 4th Floor, Main Salon B

Mary Ghali, *Chief Wellness Officer, NOTA Fitness*

Burnout is a growing concern among first responders, impacting job performance, personal relationships, and overall well-being. "The Recharge Code: Beating Burnout for First Responders" provides a structured approach to recognizing, preventing, and overcoming burnout in first responders. This session introduces a seven-step framework designed to help first responders manage stress, build resilience, and regain a sense of purpose. Participants will explore key topics, such as identifying early signs of burnout, setting healthy boundaries, managing emotional exhaustion, developing coping strategies, and incorporating mindfulness and recovery techniques into daily routines. Through real-world scenarios and interactive discussions, participants will leave with practical tools to improve mental and physical well-being, strengthen peer support networks, and sustain long-term career satisfaction. By the end of this session, first responders will be empowered with actionable strategies to combat burnout, maintain peak performance, and reclaim balance both on and off duty.

4. Posttraumatic Growth: Transforming Struggle to Strength — 4th Floor, Main Salon C

Daniel Matherly, *Director, Boulder Crest Foundation*

This session teaches participants to "Struggle Well," enabling them to prepare, practice, and implement an individualized plan for personal growth by transforming struggle into strength. Skills learned throughout the immersive workshop demonstrate how to move from struggle to growth, which occurs through exploring new possibilities, deepening relationships, developing your personal strength, appreciating life, and cultivating spiritual and existential change. Based on the proven framework of Posttraumatic Growth, participants' understanding of struggle is shifted to growth and transformation.

4:00 PM

End of Day 2

8:30 AM–10:00 AM	Trust, Trauma, and Treatment: A Guide to Choosing the Right Clinician — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E Ryan Moore, MSW, MBA, <i>former LEO</i> , and Jesalyn Moore, LCSW, LSATP, <i>Police Wellness Manager, Co-owners of Mission Mind Wellness</i> First responders face unique stressors that require specialized mental health support. But finding the right clinician—someone who truly understands the job, the trauma, and the culture—can feel like an impossible task. This keynote presentation equips participants with the knowledge and confidence to vet mental health professionals effectively, understand different treatment modalities, and take control of their well-being.
10:00 AM–10:30 AM	Break
10:30 AM–12:00 PM	Cognitive Fitness Training: The Secret Skill to Reducing Stress and Improving Performance — 4th Floor, Main Salons D/E Dr. Seth Hickerson, <i>CEO and Founder, My Steady Mind</i> The ability to be present and aware is a powerful tool. Join Dr. Seth Hickerson, CEO and founder of My Steady Mind, and learn the tools and techniques to establish your own Steady Mind formula. In this workshop, participants will have an opportunity to cultivate a steady mind by learning about neuroplasticity, STEA (Stimulus, Thoughts, Emotions, Actions), resilience, presence, focus, gratitude, and emotions. Get serious about making a change, moving beyond your comfort zone, and breaking through in your personal development. The goal is to stay steady in an unsteady world, be calm in the chaos, and be at ease in life so you can truly thrive.
12:00 PM	Conference Concludes

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional conference materials are available by accessing this QR code:



www.dcjs.virginia.gov/training-events/2025-first-responder-wellness-conference

Virginia First Responder Wellness website:



Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services – Office of First Responder Wellness

vafirstresponderwellness.org

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FOURTH FLOOR / THE MAIN BALLROOM



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