

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

Hotel Madison

710 S. Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22801

9:30 AM

MINUTES

A meeting of the Administration, Policy and Finance Committee was held at the Hotel Madison in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The meeting was called to order by Chair Abbey Johnston and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Abbey Johnston, Committee Chair – Virginia State Firefighter’s Association

Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chief’s Association

James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)

Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry

Todd King – Virginia Association of Counties

Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council

Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

John Miller – Designee, Virginia State Forester

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director

Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer

Michael Parris, Deputy Chief of Training and Operations

Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

Zeina Altaha, Grants Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Monty Willaford

Joe Kirchner

Rhett Fleitz

David Hoback

Jason Johnson

Andy Foley

Lee Williams

Andrew Milliken

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No changes to the agenda.

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PUBLIC COMMENTS

Monty Willaford with King and Queen County spoke on the new Firefighter Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Grant. He addressed the funding formula related to distressed localities, especially rural departments having to serve large geographic areas that are not on the list that could still desperately use the funds. He asked those picking the award recipients look at the list and look at other localities that could use the funding.

Joe Kirchner, with WHP Training Towers, introduced himself to the committee.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (June 2025)

Motion: Bailey **Second:** Johnson

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved.

REPORT FROM VDFP ADMINISTRATION

Chief Administrative Officer Theresa Hunter mentioned that \$45 million was paid out from the Aid-to-Localities (ATL) program but \$90,000 retained due to localities not submitting proper reports. Various written reports were submitted in the Board Packet, including new repair requests. \$1.1 million is unobligated currently from the ATL funds.

Board Chair Keith Johnson mentioned that he would not recommend awarding Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant funds to the six localities that cannot submit their proper paperwork for ATL.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chair Johnston welcomed the new Grants Manager Zeina Altaha. Johnston also thanked all the staff at VDFP for the work behind the scenes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a. Aid to Localities Grant Policy: Fire Reporting as a Condition to Receive

Spencer Willett spoke on the policy and mentioned that the law had changed, and there must be a policy adopted by the board in order to distribute grant funds, but no

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action would happen at today's meeting. Everything needs to be in place by the July 2026 deadline. A compliance report would be created by the Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) twice a year indicating which fire departments are reporting to the new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS).

Johnson mentioned that some on the board advocate for codes and there has been a lack of data, but recently it has gotten better with NERIS. The data in the future should help support fire safety codes.

Chair Johnston mentioned that the fire service needed better practices to gather data that is needed to support funding. She also commented on ensuring that any locality that receives funds will be required to submit the proper paperwork to qualify.

Walt Bailey acknowledged the need but will be voting against the policy due to the cost that departments will incur. Johnston mentioned that a new grant could help those departments, as well as the additional Mini-Grant funding.

James Calvert asked Chair Johnston about the percentage of departments reporting. Spencer Willett said Ken Brown, VDFP Community Risk Reduction Coordinator, mentioned about 50% of departments report, but many are incomplete.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Halifax County Fire and EMS Study Report

Motion: To adopt the Halifax County Fire and EMS Study Report

Motion: Bailey **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: Johnston mentioned it was a great opportunity to serve on the studies.

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Study approved for Board

b. Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant Program Update

Motion: Retroactively update the policy to include the revised language as presented.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Bailey

Discussion on the Motion: Johnston mentioned that, in the past, funds went to the locality. This language change would allow individual departments to apply and receive the funds.

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Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

c. Fire Incident Reporting Grant

Motion: To adopt the revised language and create the Fire Incident Reporting Grant

Motion: Duck **Second:** Sites

Discussion on the Motion: Willett mentioned the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) grant covered hardware. The new grant would cover up to \$10,000 and expand allowable uses including hardware, software on an annual basis, internet connectivity, and other projects that the board could consider. Steve Sites asked Bailey if his concerns were addressed. Bailey still feels like it may be an obstacle for certain localities

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

d. Regional Fire Services Training Facilities Grant Extension Request – Town of Blackstone

Lee Williams of Blackstone spoke on the department's request.

Motion: To approve the extension request for the Town of Blackstone

Motion: Calvert **Second:** Sites

Discussion on the Motion: Lee Williams of Blackstone asked if they could request up to a year. Hunter mentioned the request was up to the locality.

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

e. Regional Fire Services Training Facilities Grant Extension Request - VDFP Training and Operations

Motion: To accept VDFP Training and Operations 1-year extension request

Motion: Calvert **Second:** Sites

Discussion on the Motion: Michael Parris spoke on the extension.

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

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- f. Regional Fire Services Training Facilities FY26 Grant Application – King and Queen County

Motion: To approve the grant application for King and Queen County at 90 percent of the project amount

Motion: Bailey **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: Willaford with King and Queen spoke on the request and their coalition with other localities, such as Middlesex. Calvert asked about the Max Fire Box and why two were being ordered. Willaford mentioned that nine departments would be using them, and it would be easier to house the larger one and share the smaller boxes among the departments. The goal is to make it available to other departments.

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

- g. Regional Fire Services Training Facilities FY26 Grant Application – City of Roanoke

Motion: To approve the City of Roanoke's grant application at 75 percent of the project amount

Motion: Bailey **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: Rhett Fleitz spoke on the request for a flashover simulator. It would be housed in City of Roanoke and create training programs that any locality can use. Project total is \$92,000 and the locality is requesting \$46,000. Calvert asked how it would differ from Lynchburg. Sites asked if the prop is something firefighters would go into, and Fleitz confirmed it would and will be stationary behind their burn building. Johnson mentioned Loudoun had one and it was a great tool. Bailey asked how much funding is available and Johnston mentioned \$1.1 million.

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

- h. Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant Application Review

Johnston mentioned the requests came in over the amount allocated. No action will happen today, but a work group will need to be formed to score the applications.

There is \$5 million that can be awarded and priority given to the fiscal stress index localities. However, it doesn't mean a jurisdiction automatically will get the grant.

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Bailey stated he was excited to get the funding, and he sympathized with rural departments not getting the funding they deserve but mentioned the board must follow requirements when deciding who gets the funding. Calvert mentioned that he would serve on the workgroup. Sites asked about the authority of the workgroup to amend the grant request if they feel a department does not need the full amount. Johnston said that, like last year, the request can be amended. She mentioned some examples of scoring criteria such as the timeliness of the application, etc., but the language is very broad. Although scoring is time intensive, the overall process from last year is simple, thanks to the scoring spreadsheet. Johnston will also serve on the scoring workgroup, along with Sites and Calvert. Hunter mentioned that three board members cannot serve, only two, so Johnston removed herself. Hunter asked about replacement versus new equipment. Johnston said there is no distinction. Bailey stated that it is more important to keep active members safe than to buy new gear for someone who just joined. Johnston added that many localities are bringing in new recruits who will need new gear. Hunter asked how the grading would be done if everyone is neutral. Johnston explained that first sets of PPE have priority over second sets. Expired gear should take priority over gear expiring more than 3 years from now. Johnston asked, if the board were to fund everyone that qualifies what that percentage would look like. Sites wanted to clarify the 2nd set of gear asking what if there is a department actively fighting fires, and a 2 set would help prevent cancer.? Sites wanted to clarify the second set of gear asking what if there is a department actively fighting fires, and a 2nd set would help prevent cancer? Johnston mentioned that the board should lean towards prioritizing 1st sets and as the funds increase, begin to consider 2nd sets. Johnston mentioned that the board should lean towards prioritizing first sets and as the funds increase, begin to consider second sets.

i. Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) FY26 Grant Award Recommendations

Motion: To approve the VFIRS FY26 applications as presented.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Calvert

Discussion on the Motion:

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

j. VFSB Mini-Grant Funding

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Johnston said that funding for this year included a little over \$1.3 million. She mentioned that \$225,000 could go towards fire incident reporting grants while other funds could be directed towards underfunded grants from last year. The remaining \$515,000 could be distributed for other areas, such as apparatus tires, hoods, extractors to wash gear properly, thermal imaging cameras, and gas monitors. Johnston welcomed comments on how the funds should be utilized.

Johnson supported funding previous grants that were underfunded but, also, looking at overall funding for safety, as well as exhaust systems.

Bailey mentioned concerns with funding requests that were not fully funded last year, as last year's need may not be there anymore. Hunter mentioned that the new Firefighter PPE and Equipment Grant could also help those departments. Charles Sterne asked about the criteria for selection. Willett mentioned the language is very broad, but the committee narrows the priority down. This is in addition to what the policy requires. Sites asked if staff could reach out to those who did not receive grants last year to see if they still need the funds. Bailey mentioned that, if the need is still there, then they can get funded the next round. \$750,000 could go in the pot for those localities to reapply. Funds for the Fire Incident Report Grant should be a different motion, according to Willett.

Motion: To move \$225,000 to the Fire Incident Reporting Grant program.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Duck

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approved for Board

Johnston mentioned guiding staff on the new application, and that health and safety should be the priority for the remaining funds. Willett suggested that the committee provide clarification to VDFP staff as they develop the application for funds as well as what items localities can request funding for.

Bailey mentioned that VFSB members are often asked by departments for extensions and asked if, at a future meeting, the committee can look at extending the initial timelines for grants. Hunter responded that it was up to the VFSB, but that the burn buildings were extended to 3 years. This will be an agenda at the next meeting.

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ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee

Spencer Willett

Minutes completed by Tracey Frame

Documents related to this meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board may be requested by contacting the Government Affairs Division by emailing PolicyOffice@vdfp.virginia.gov