

Marcus Alert

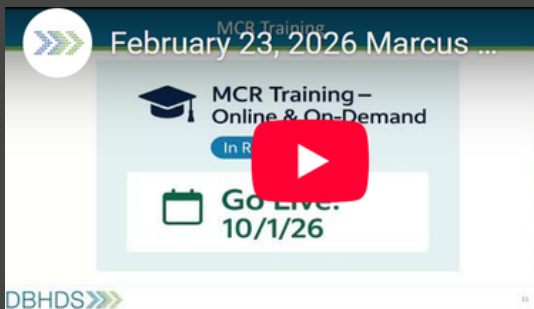
Newsletter on Marcus Alert and the Crisis Transformation for Region 4 of Virginia

State Marcus Alert Updates

Twice per year, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) host the Marcus Alert Statewide Stakeholder Meeting to provide statewide updates on implementation. Topics from the last meeting included data reporting, training, legislative changes, 988, and more.

Localities also had the opportunity to share-out, including representatives from Richmond's Community Response Team and Henrico's Mobile Response Team!

[Click here](#) or on the video below to watch the recording of the last meeting.



National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week

April 12-18th is National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week! This week recognizes the 911 dispatchers, call takers, and communication specialists for their vital role in public safety and emergency response. Learn more and nominate a telecommunicator at npstw.org

911 Q&A

When do people call 911?

You might be surprised to hear that only about half of individuals who initiate contact with the police do so to report a possible crime. More often, they are seeking some sort of help, such as help with a medical emergency or a traffic incident ([Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2024](#)). In fact, a study across nine major cities by the [Vera Institute for Justice \(2022\)](#) found that an average of 19% of 911 calls involved behavioral health needs and could be responded to by civilian-led unarmed crisis response teams.

How does Marcus Alert involve 911?

A key component of Virginia's Marcus Alert legislation involves 911 centers diverting behavioral health calls to behavioral health responses. To do so, each 911 center works with their locality to develop a framework for triaging mental health 911 calls. This framework must include transferring mental health calls classified as "low-level" to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, who may then dispatch Mobile Crisis Response teams. The framework also includes prioritizing the dispatch of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained police officers for "higher-level" mental health calls. If available within the locality, the framework may also include dispatching community or co-response teams, such as teams of clinicians and peers, clinicians and paramedics, or clinicians and police officers. To learn more about Marcus Alert, check out [DBHDS's website](#).

Chesterfield 911 Feature

In this newsletter, we are featuring two Emergency Communications Officers (ECOs) from Chesterfield Emergency Communications, also known as Chesterfield 911! Keep reading to learn about Hope and Crystal.



What is your role with Chesterfield 911?

Hope: I am an Emergency Communications Officer (ECO) V. I am also on our Community Outreach Team, a Lead Dispatcher, Trainer, and DCJS General Instructor. I have been here for 33 years.

Crystal: I have been working for Chesterfield 911 for 10 years this June. I am currently an ECO III and serve as a Call Taker and Police Radio Dispatcher.

What made you interested in working at Chesterfield 911?

Hope: I dispatched for Blackstone Police and Fire Departments while going to college. I really enjoyed it, so when this opportunity came up I applied. It was a position that I could actually help people in.

Crystal: I was looking for a position where I could feel that the work I do really mattered and where I could make a difference in my own community.

What is the most challenging part of job, as it relates to taking mental health crisis calls?

Hope: The volume of mental health crisis calls has really increased since I started in 1992. The most challenging part for me is sometimes I feel like we never get closure. Sometimes I struggle with what to say in some situations and wish we had more training for people in mental health crisis.

Crystal: Being on the other side of the phone. You can't physically be there with the person to read their faces, body language, or look in their eyes as you communicate. The only thing we have is our voice to try to establish a real connection with someone in crisis to try to help them.

What is the most rewarding part of your job, as it relates to taking mental health crisis calls?

Hope: Those days that I feel like I actually reached someone. For some people they just need someone to hear them and they are appreciative that you listened to what they were saying.

Crystal: When I am able to give people some confidence that I do care about them and their situation, and that I am sending them someone with the skills to get them connected to the help they need.

What is something you wish the general public knew or understood about being an ECO?

Hope: I wish people understood that we can help them until someone gets to them. People always tell us to just send someone, when they have help on the phone until someone arrives.

Crystal: We are doing our best to get each caller the appropriate help. This is going to require us to ask questions. Each question has a purpose and is not delaying getting help. Please answer as best as you can.



Have questions?

Feel free to contact Hannah Neukrug, Marcus Alert Coordinator for Region 4, at: hannah.neukrug@rbha.org