



Specialty Dockets Services Newsletter Fall 2026

Updates, Stories, Successes, & Systemwide Progress



Judicial Services
Office of the Executive Secretary
Supreme Court of Virginia



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Important Updates Across Virginia's Specialty Dockets

Virginia's Specialty Dockets continue to grow and evolve, with new initiatives, resources, milestones, and opportunities supporting courts and their partners across the Commonwealth. This section highlights important announcements and updates for specialty docket teams.



Virginia Specialty Docket Advisory Committees Adopt Statewide Standards

In September 2026, Virginia's Specialty Dockets Advisory Committee, in collaboration with the Veterans Docket Advisory Committee, Behavioral Health Docket Advisory Committee, and Recovery Court Advisory Committee, adopted Virginia Specialty Docket Standards. Developed through a collaborative effort and with the support of Chief Justice Powell, the standards provide a consistent framework to promote best practices, strengthen program operations, and support quality and sustainability across Virginia's specialty dockets.

The adoption of these standards represents a significant milestone in Virginia's continued commitment to specialty docket practices and improved outcomes for participants, families, and communities.



Specialty Dockets Services Launches Updated Specialty Dockets Applications

SDS recently released revised applications for recovery court, behavioral health dockets, and veterans' treatment dockets to streamline the application process.

The revised applications provide clearer guidance on required content and include detailed instructions on what information to include and how to organize the application. They can be found on the SDS website under “Forms.”

Note: The Best Practice Team can provide optional technical assistance by reviewing operation manuals and handbooks and offering guidance to support dockets throughout the application process. Please reach out to the Best Practices Specialists by using the [Best Practices Request Form](#)



Specialty Dockets Services (SDS) Welcomes New Team Members

Please join us in welcoming the newest members of the Specialty Dockets Services (SDS) team, Angela Dodson, Training Coordinator, and Madison Brown, SDS Administrative Assistant.

We are excited to have Madison and Angela join the team and look forward to the experience, expertise, and support they will bring to SDS and Virginia's Specialty Dockets.



Announcements: Specialty Dockets in Numbers

Total Specialty Dockets Statewide:

60 Recovery Courts

27 Behavioral Health Dockets

10 Veterans Treatment Dockets

Total: 97





Training Updates

Training Coordinator, Angela Dodson





Behavioral
Health
Dockets



Recovery
Courts



Veterans
Treatment
Dockets



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2026 Training Conferences

Specialty Dockets Services (SDS) Training Conference - Virginia Beach

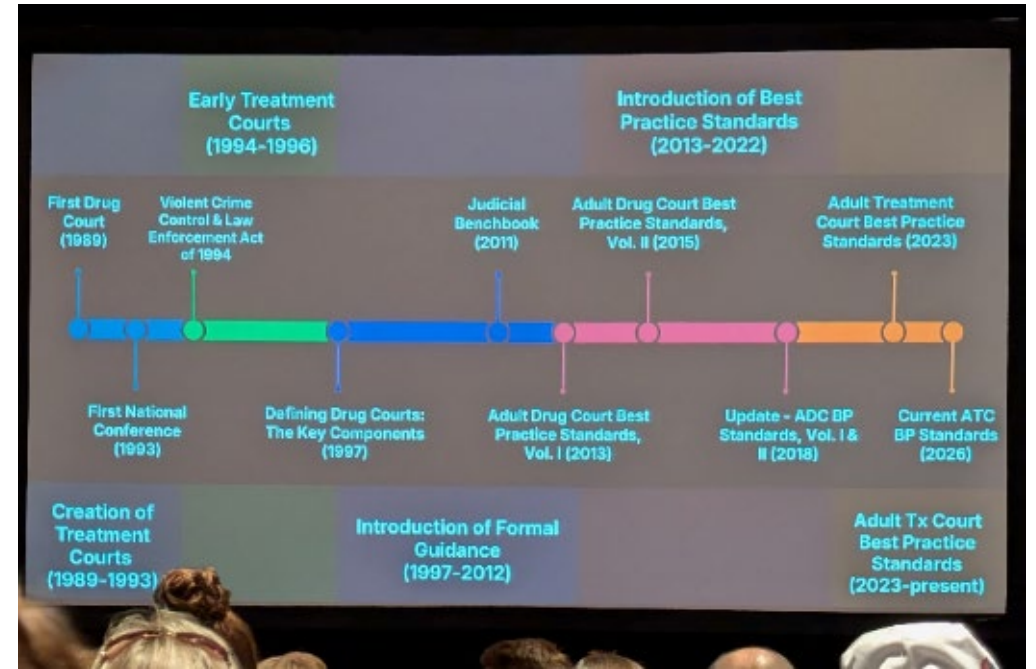
The 2026 Specialty Dockets Training continued the tradition of bringing together professionals from across the Commonwealth to strengthen and advance Virginia's Specialty Dockets. This year's training brought together 411 attendees, including over 60 judges and 20 presenters.

Guided by the theme "Breaking Cycles, Building Futures," the program featured 24 sessions shaped by the needs and interests of Specialty Dockets professionals. Guest speakers shared compelling personal accounts, helpful tools, and detailed research supporting successful outcomes in Virginia's Specialty Dockets, highlighting the meaningful impact these programs can have on individuals, families, and communities.

Through shared learning and collaboration, the training highlighted how Specialty Dockets can help individuals move beyond cycles of substance use and mental illness while creating pathways toward healthier, more stable futures.

All Rise Conference

The All Rise RISE26 Conference, held July 20–23, 2026, in Nashville, Tennessee, brought together more than 7,000 professionals from across the justice, treatment, behavioral health, recovery, and veterans’ communities. The conference provided opportunities to learn about the latest research, evidence-based practices, and innovative approaches to treatment courts and justice system responses. Attendees participated in hundreds of educational sessions, connected with professionals from across the country, and gained practical strategies to strengthen treatment court programs and improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals.



All Rise Best Practices Presentation: Timeline of Treatment Courts & Best Practices



Inaugural Virginia Recovery Conference

Hosted by the Virginia Opioid Abatement Foundation and supported by the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority, the inaugural 2026 Virginia Recovery Conference in Roanoke brought together more than 400 recovery leaders, practitioners, peers, policymakers, researchers, advocates, local government representatives, and community partners from across the Commonwealth.

The sold-out statewide conference showcased best practices and innovative approaches to substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery, while highlighting how communities are leveraging opioid settlement funds to save lives, strengthen families, and build healthier communities.



VIRGINIA
RECOVERY
CONFERENCE

Roanoke | June 15-17

2026 Judicial Conference of Virginia for District Courts

For the first time, Specialty Docket Services (SDS) exhibited at the conference, connecting directly with judges from across the Commonwealth.

SDS provided information, answered questions, and shared how to start or expand specialty dockets. Judges also learned about SDS resources and the support available throughout the planning and implementation process.

The conference was a valuable opportunity to increase awareness of specialty dockets and connect with judges.



Left to right: Liane Hanna and Monica DiGiandomenico, SDS Best Practices Specialists



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Supporting Specialty Dockets Through Training

Suggested All Rise E-Learning Modules (*Great for onboarding new staff*)

All Rise offers a range of [e-learning modules](#) to help specialty dockets become familiar with best practices and program fundamentals. We recommend beginning with the *Best Practice Standards* series (6 modules, 7.25 hours) and the *Essential Elements* series (10 modules, 7 hours 10 minutes).

Most modules take 1–1.5 hours to complete, while the *Role of the Mentor in VTC* module is 8 hours. These self-paced courses provide practical guidance and foundational knowledge to support dockets in effectively implementing specialty docket programs.

They are designed to supplement, not replace, SDS implementation or refresher training.





Grants & Budget Updates

Grants Management Analyst, Auriel Diggs &
Budget Analyst, Renee Rosales



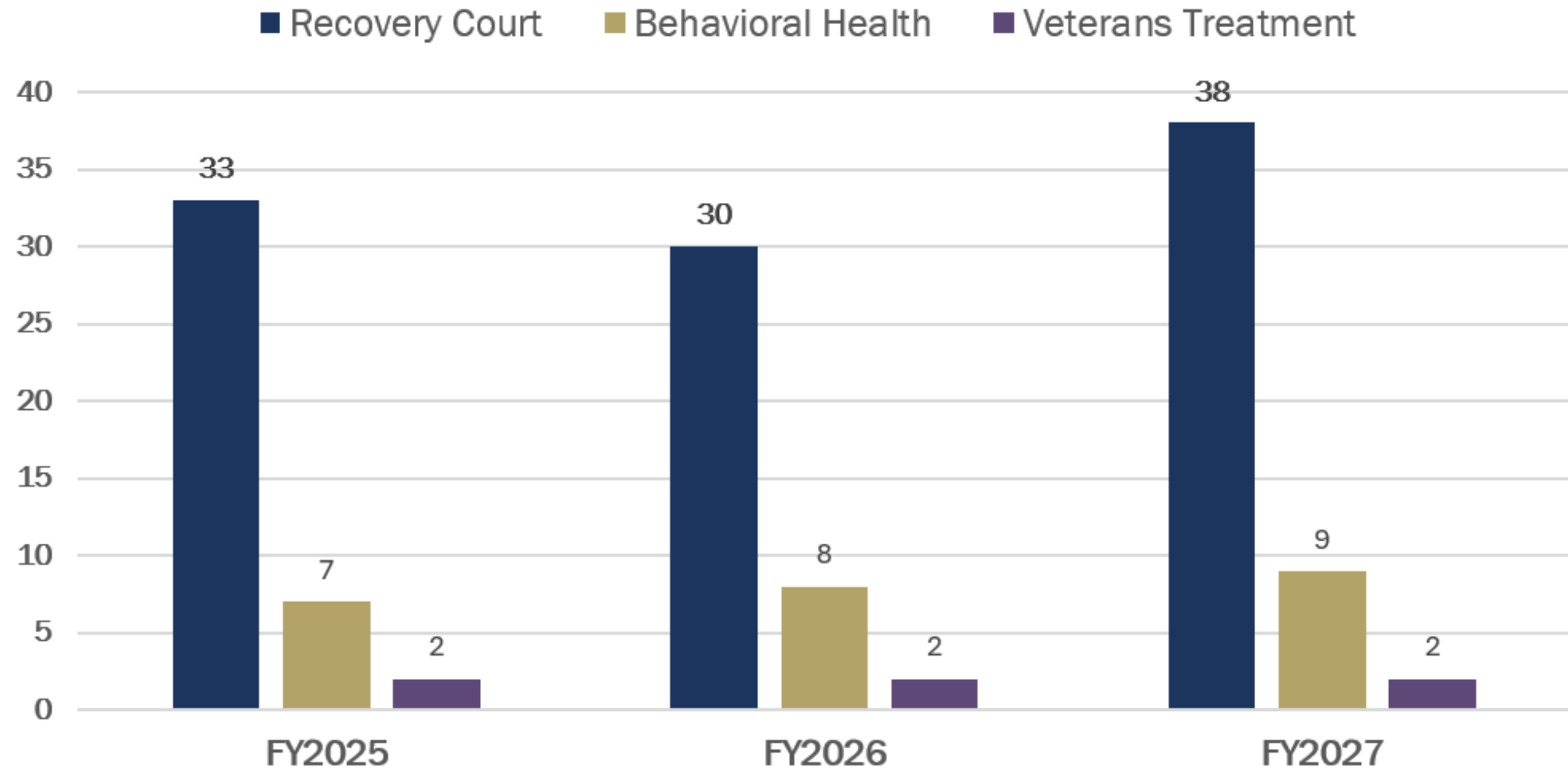
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Statewide Universal Drug Testing Grant

The Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) has awarded \$788,000.00 in fiscal year 2027 funding to the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES). The goal of this funding is for dockets to partner with a single leading drug testing provider in the criminal justice field that adheres to drug testing best practices. This new round of funding will cover the federal grant period from October 2026 to September 2027. In fiscal year 2026, OES awarded over \$600,000.00 to 23 specialty dockets. For questions or more information, please contact specialtydocketsgrants@vacourts.gov.



Funded Dockets



Specialty Dockets Funding

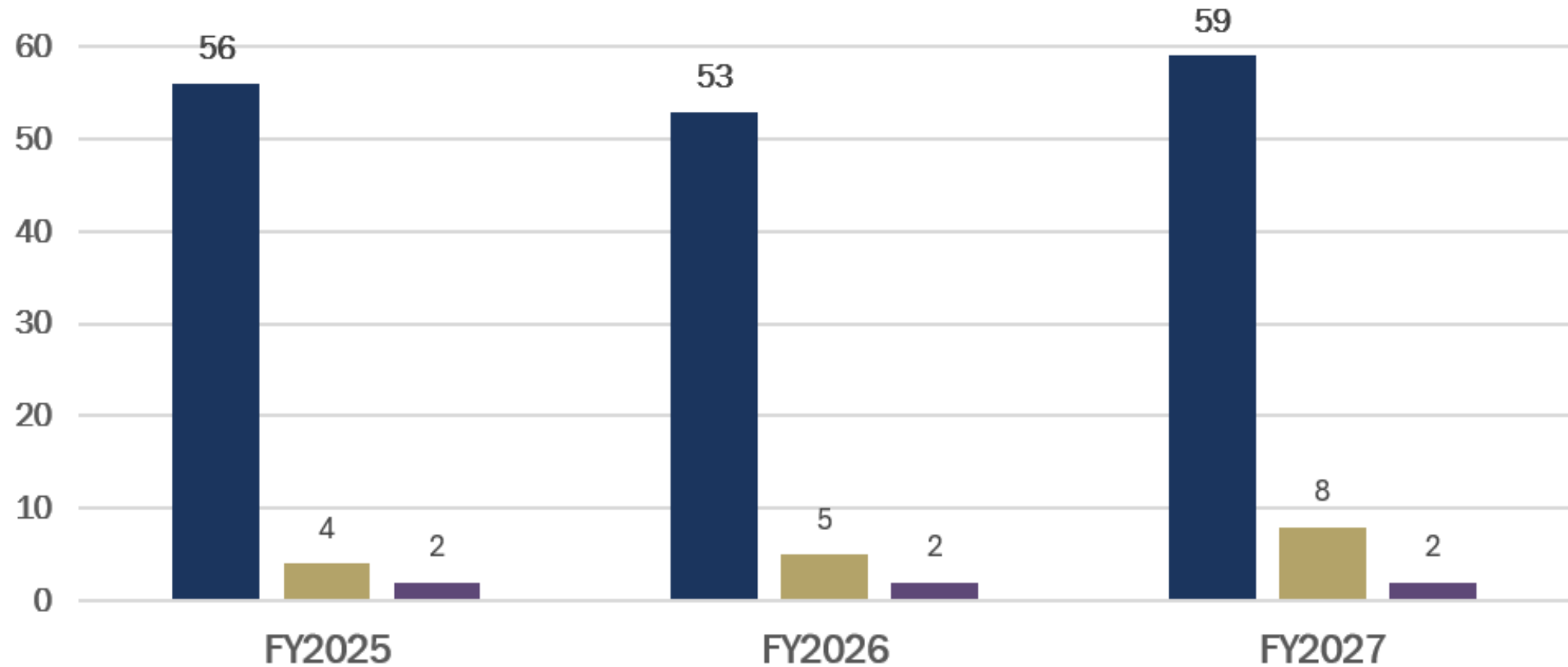
For fiscal year 2027, 49 Specialty Dockets were awarded state funds through a reimbursable grant process. To be eligible for funding, you must be approved to operate by the designated advisory committee, maintain current data in the Specialty Docket DIMS Database, and maintain a minimum of 10 active participants in the program. These funds primarily support personnel positions to support program operations.

The Specialty Docket Grant provides funding to 69 recovery court, behavioral health, and veterans treatment docket positions for fiscal year 2027. During fiscal year 2025, funding priorities were modified to focus on funding 100%, full-time dedicated docket team positions. These positions assist in providing program sustainability, reducing recidivism, and successful operations.



Funded Positions

■ Recovery Court ■ Behavioral Health ■ Veterans Treatment



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Specialty Dockets Funding

If your program has funding needs, please reach out to specialtydocketsgrants@vacourts.gov to set up a meeting. We are happy to meet with your team to review current grant opportunities and assist with creating a budget.

Dockets awarded grants through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) or the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) are encouraged to engage the Best Practice Specialists (BPS) Team for best practice–focused technical assistance and guidance. The BPS Team can help support alignment with grant requirements.





Best Practices Updates

Best Practices Specialists, Liane Hanna and Monica DiGiandomenico



Best Practice Support

Best Practice Specialists (BPS) provide personalized attention, resources, and expert guidance to support each docket's unique needs, including:

- Needs assessments to identify program strengths and areas for growth;
- Personalized technical assistance, guidance, and training aligned with evidence-based best practice standards;
- Review and feedback on policy and procedure manuals and participant handbooks; and
- Assistance throughout the specialty dockets application process.

Specialty dockets interested in receiving support are encouraged to complete the [Best Practice Request Form](#) or reach out to the team directly at Lhanna@vacourts.gov and mdigiandomenico@vacourts.gov



Specialty Dockets Services Best Practices Team Visits

Seeing Recovery Firsthand

Following the January 2026 release of the updated All Rise Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards, the Best Practices Specialist Team conducted 24 site visits and provided individualized technical assistance to 25 specialty dockets, offering guidance and support with operations manuals and handbooks, program needs assessments, implementation efforts, operational challenges, and opportunities for continued program enhancements.



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Left to right: Christopher Mayers, PWC Coordinator; Katlin Wajeel, Veteran Mentor Coordinator; Monica DiGiandomenico and Liane Hanna, SDS Best Practices Specialists; Kristin Thompson, PWC Probation Officer; Isabella Passos, PWC VTD Treatment Coordinator



Left to right: Jamie Hurd, Fairfax County VTD Coordinator; Tameka Parker, Fairfax County VTD Treatment Coordinator; Amy Jordan, Fairfax County Senior Assistant Public Defender; Michael Murphy and Hank Roeder, Fairfax County VTD Mentors

Best Practices Spotlight Standard

Drug and Alcohol Testing

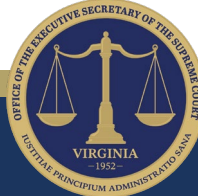
- Drug and alcohol testing provides an accurate, timely, and comprehensive assessment of substance use throughout participants' enrollment in treatment court.
- Forensic drug and alcohol testing is conducted frequently enough to ensure that unauthorized substance use is detected quickly and reliably.
 - Urine testing, the most common methodology used in treatment courts and probation programs, is administered *at least twice per week* until participants have achieved early remission of their substance use disorder and are reliably engaged in recovery management activities and preparing for graduation.
- The schedule of forensic drug and alcohol testing is *random and unpredictable*.



Best Practices Spotlight Standard

- Participants are required to produce a test specimen as soon as practicable after being notified that a test has been scheduled. Urine specimens are delivered ***no more than 8 hours*** after the participant is notified that a urine test has been scheduled. For tests with short detection windows, such as oral fluid tests, specimens are delivered ***no more than 4 hours*** after the participant is notified that a test has been scheduled.
- Drug and alcohol test results are typically reported simply as ***positive or negative***. Treatment courts do not attempt to engage in quantitative analysis of drug tests or draw conclusions from drug concentrations in urine samples. Treatment courts do not attempt to evaluate results that fall below the cutoff threshold for the testing method used.

Note: Best Practices emphasize that drug and alcohol testing should be individualized and informed by the participant's assessed treatment needs. A mental health disorder alone should not automatically result in drug testing unless there is an identified substance use disorder or other clinically indicated reason for testing. Participants with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders should receive integrated treatment and appropriate monitoring based on their individual needs.





September 2026: National Recovery Month

Recovery Month is held annually in September since 1989 to promote awareness of mental health and substance use recovery, celebrate individuals in recovery, and highlight effective treatment and support systems. “Recovery Happens Together” was the official theme for 2026.



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From the Field: Celebrating Local Impact

Graduations, Milestones & Events

Celebrate your docket's successes! If you would like your docket's graduations, milestones, or special events featured in the SDS newsletter, please submit your requests to specialtydockets@vacourts.gov.



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Recovery Statistics 2026: The Numbers that Inspire Hope



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- **Recovery rates**
 - Over 22 million Americans are in recovery from substance use disorders. The majority of people who seek sustained help eventually achieve lasting recovery. 5-year recovery rates: 50-60% for those who engage in ongoing support.
 - In 2025, the Commonwealth reported 65,290 people receiving recovery services, including 5,723 people receiving services in justice settings, and more than 1,678 active Certified Peer Recovery Specialists.
- **Treatment**
 - Reduces substance use by 50-70%, and criminal activity by 80%,
- **MAT effectiveness**
 - Buprenorphine and methadone reduce opioid overdose deaths by approximately 50%.
 - Naltrexone reduces heavy drinking days by 25%.

Source: SAMHSA & Treatment Association. (2026). *Recovery statistics 2026: The numbers that inspire hope.*

Lynchburg & Bedford Recovery Courts Community Celebration & Proclamation

On Saturday, May 23, 2026, the Lynchburg Adult Recovery Court and Bedford Family Recovery Court partnered to host a community celebration in recognition of National Recovery Court Month. Participants, alumni, and judges gathered for an afternoon of food, fellowship, and recognition.

The celebration also included a formal proclamation from the Lynchburg City Council on May 12, 2026.



Lynchburg Mayor Larry Taylor (left) and Lynchburg Recovery Court Coordinator Taylor Jones (right) celebrate the City of Lynchburg's proclamation recognizing May as Treatment Court Month.





Prince William County Board of County Supervisors, Prince William County Recovery Court and Veterans Treatment Docket Coordinators, as well as the Community Service Board.



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Prince William County Veterans Treatment Docket & Recovery Court Proclamation

Prince William County Board of County Supervisors joined the Prince William County Adult Recovery Court and Veterans Treatment Docket coordinators, Veteran Mentors, Criminal Justice Services leadership, and the PWC Police Department for a special proclamation recognizing National Treatment Court Month. The occasion provided an opportunity to celebrate the important work of the specialty dockets and their impact on the community.



Celebrating National Recovery Month

On Saturday, September 19, Russell County Recovery Court welcomed neighboring Dickinson and Buchanan County Recovery Courts for “Recovery Rumble”, a field day competition celebrating National Recovery Month. Teams competed in a variety of fun events, with Buchanan County Recovery Court taking home the trophy! The day was filled with friendly competition, great food, fellowship, and a celebration of recovery.



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Left to right: Participants and alumni from all 3 recovery courts. Also pictured are: Israel O’Quinn, Delegate; Missy Carter, Russell County Coordinator; Zack Stoots, Russell County Commonwealth’s Attorney; Ashley Shreeves, Buchanan County Coordinator; Justin Vass, Dickinson County Probation Officer; Michael Moore, Russell County Circuit Court Judge; Bill Watson, Russell County Sheriff; Brian Patton, Dickinson County Circuit Court Judge; Katie Patton, Russell County Circuit Court Clerk

Celebrating 10 Years: Northwest Regional Adult Recovery Court



The Northwest Regional Adult Recovery Court in Winchester celebrated its 10-year anniversary this August. To mark the milestone, the program hosted a special celebration dinner, bringing together team members, community partners, and many of the individuals who helped launch the program.

The team also created a special anniversary video featuring Recovery Court graduates sharing their stories and reflecting on what the program has meant to them. The evening was a meaningful celebration of a decade of recovery, collaboration, and lives changed through the program.





BHD Graduate says “I Do”: Judge Vakos Officiates Wedding

The Honorable Alex Vakos, Judge of the Fredericksburg General District Court, recently officiated the wedding of a recent graduate of the Spotsylvania Behavioral Health Docket. This was Judge Vakos’ first time serving as a wedding officiant, making the occasion especially memorable.





Hanover Adult Recovery Court “Good Things in the Making”

The Hanover Adult Recovery Court in September hosted a creative series, “Good Things in the Making.” Some of the events they hosted included “Paint with Pals” (a painting experience), “Peace by Piece” (creating a mosaic), and “Let’s Mandala! Moving Ahead, Nurturing Dreams, Achieving Lasting Abstinence.”

Photos of the art created during the event.



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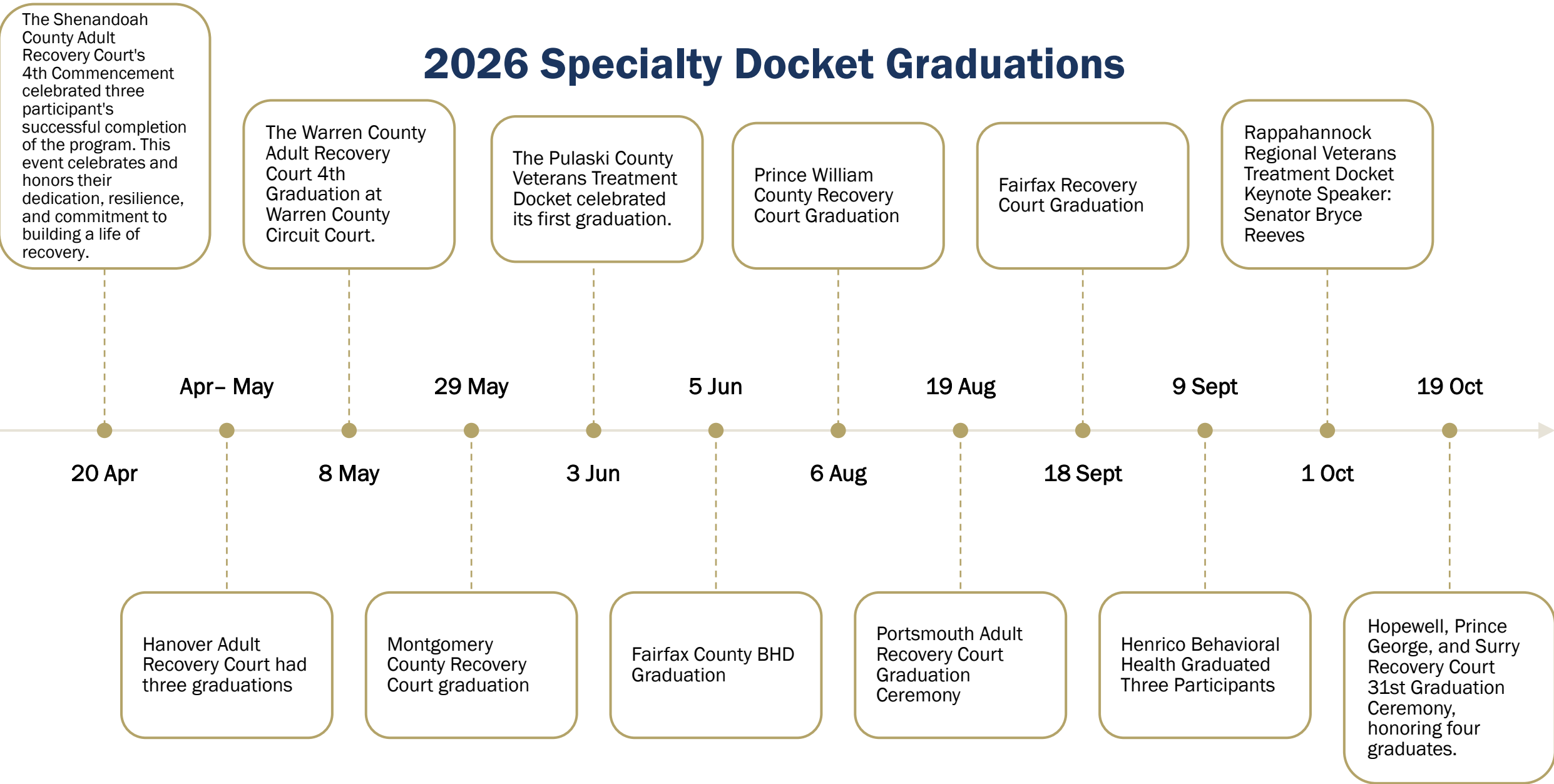


Specialty Docket Graduations



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2026 Specialty Docket Graduations



20th Graduate Marks Special Milestone for Spotsylvania Behavioral Health Docket (BHD)



Spotsylvania BHD judge, team, and participants.

The Spotsylvania BHD celebrated its 20th graduate. The docket also held its annual specialty docket picnic, where participants took the initiative to create their own BHD T-shirts, adding a special and personal touch to the event.



Eight Graduates Celebrated at Lynchburg Adult Recovery Court Ceremony

For many people dealing with addiction, recovery can feel out of reach. However, for eight graduates of the Lynchburg Adult Recovery Court, recovery became a milestone worth celebrating on Wednesday, June 3, 2026.

During Wednesday's graduation ceremony, participants reflected on the impact the program has had on their lives.



Photo of the Lynchburg Adult Recovery Court Ceremony



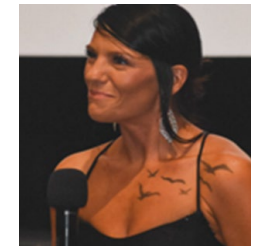
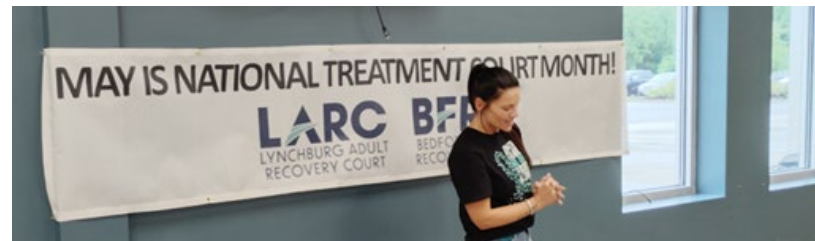
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Bedford Family Recovery Court (BFRC)

Amber Guernsey graduated on August 19, 2026. Amber has demonstrated an incredible commitment to recovery, personal growth, and helping others. A strong advocate for recovery, Amber has shared her story at community events, including BFRC National Treatment Month pro social event and Oxford Premiere. She regularly supports peers in the BFRC program and the broader recovery community.



Left to right: Chris Sexauer, Carmen Barnhart, Dakota Tappen, Dammy Onafowokan, Amber Guernsey, Judge Stephanie Ayers, Ellen Smith, Leslie Bryant, Meghan McGinnity, Susan Lynch).



Amber Guernsey at speaking engagements



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Portsmouth Adult Recovery Court Graduation Ceremony

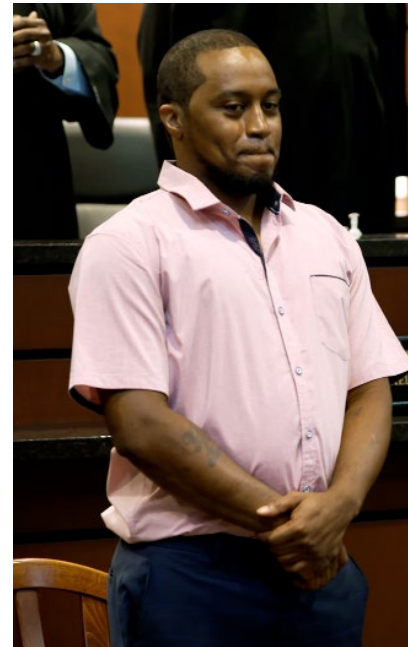
On August 19, 2026, the Portsmouth Adult Recovery Court celebrated the successful completion of graduate Shaun Caldwell, who achieved 434 days of abstinence following a nine-year history of substance use. Caldwell shared that creating structure in his daily life was an important part of his recovery journey. Dr. Melvin O. Marriner delivered the keynote address, offering encouragement and inspiration to Caldwell, fellow participants, and attendees. Under the leadership of Judge Michael J. Massie and Chief Judge Douglas B. Ottinger, the program continues to support participants as they pursue recovery, stability, and successful reentry into the community



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Left to right: Judge Michael J. Massie & Chief Judge Douglas B. Ottinger, and Dr. Melvin O. Marriner

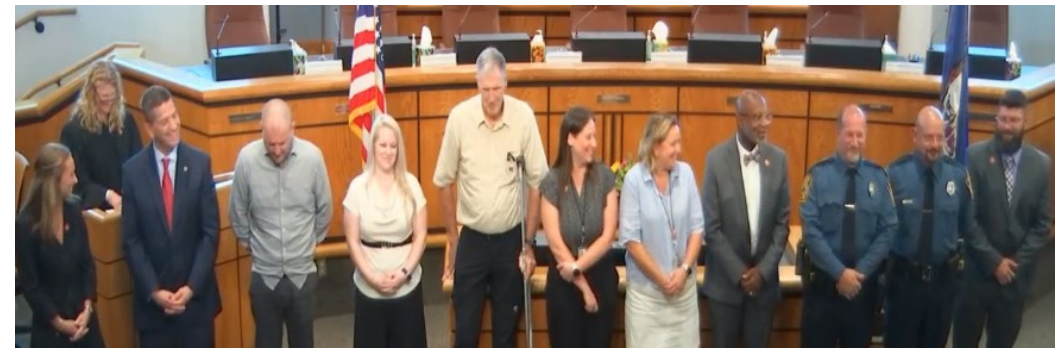
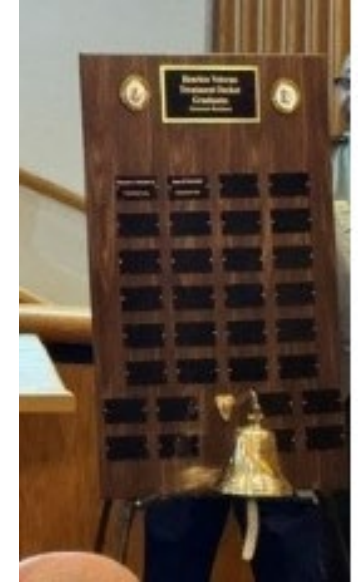


Left to right: Shaun Caldwell (Graduate), Judge Michael J. Massie & Chief Judge Douglas B. Ottinger, and Judge Brenda S. Spry

Milestone: Henrico Veterans Treatment Court Graduation Ceremony

On August 28, 2026, the Henrico County VTD held its inaugural graduation ceremony, celebrating the successful completion of the program by two participants.

As part of the celebration, graduates participated in the traditional ringing of the bell, commemorating their achievement and the completion of their journey through the program.



Left to right: Judge N. Fox with graduating participants. Lilah Blount, Mike Jagels, Kyle Anderson, Aimee Broadney, John Lynch, Valerie Natoli, Hattie Figgers, Carlos Talley, Kevin Wire, Ashley Ruby, Danny Fisher II (not pictured: Nat Moger, Danny Pacifico, Sean Breit-Rupe); (at the Podium: Judge Fox).



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Bernard Greene 5K — Supporting Henrico Specialty Court Participants



Henrico Specialty Dockets is excited to host the Bernard Greene 5K. This community event will bring people together for a great cause, with all proceeds benefiting Henrico County Specialty Court participants, including those involved in Recovery Court, Veterans Treatment Docket, and Behavioral Health Docket programs. Attendees can enjoy a bounce house, raffles, prizes, music, and more.

Mark your calendar for October 17 and come help them make a difference in the lives of Henrico Specialty Court participants.



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Chesterfield Specialty Dockets: Celebrating Milestones and Giving Back

Over the past three months, Chesterfield Specialty Dockets have celebrated several meaningful milestones and accomplishments.

The Veterans Treatment Docket (VTD) celebrated two graduates on August 13, 2026, and hosted its first annual cookout, bringing participants and the team together for fellowship and celebration.



Photos from the Chesterfield Veterans Treatment Docket cookout



Chesterfield Specialty Dockets: Celebrating Milestones and Giving Back



The Recovery Court celebrated two graduates on September 9, 2026, alongside its second annual Art Show. The program also launched an Alumni Group, led by its Peer Recovery Specialist. The group is already giving back to the program by donating school supplies for the children of current participants.



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Photos: Artwork created by Chesterfield Recovery Court participants during the annual Art Show.

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Specialty Dockets Services Team



Left to right: Budget Analyst Renee Rosales, Administrative Assistant Madison Brown, Data Analyst Celin Job, Assistant Coordinator Danny Livengood, Coordinator Anna Powers, Best Practices Specialist Liane Hanna, Training Coordinator Angela Dodson, Grants Analyst Auriel Diggs, and Best Practices Specialist Monica DiGiandomenico.



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