



Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy (VOPA)

An Introduction

Mission Statement

Through zealous and effective advocacy and legal representation to:

- protect and advance legal, human, and civil rights of persons with disabilities;
- combat and prevent abuse, neglect, and discrimination; and
- promote independence, choice, and self-determination by persons with disabilities.

Introduction

VOPA may help with disability-related problems like abuse, neglect, and discrimination. All callers will receive some level of help. Individuals with issues targeted in our goals and objectives may receive advocacy services or legal representation.

VOPA May Help By

- providing disability information and resources;
- explaining rights and responsibilities; and
- giving guidance on solving disability-related problems.

For individuals whose issue falls within annual goals, objectives, and case selection criteria, VOPA may help by:

- investigating complaints;
- negotiating solutions;
- providing advocacy; or
- providing legal representation.

How Do I Request Services?

- Call VOPA at: 1-800-552-3962 (Toll-Free in Virginia) (Voice/TTY)
- Write to VOPA at: 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, Virginia 23230
- E-Mail VOPA at: general.vopa@vopa.virginia.gov

What Happens When You Contact VOPA?

When you contact VOPA for assistance, you will speak to the Receptionist who will ask for basic information (such as your name, address, and reason for contacting VOPA). The Receptionist will either provide you with information and referral or schedule a time when a Resource Advocate will call you.

The Resource Advocate will ask for more detailed information about your situation to determine if VOPA can help you.

How Can You Help?

If VOPA provides you with assistance, you should:

- sign release forms and return them;
- keep VOPA informed of changes in contact information (such as address and phone number);
- advise VOPA if your situation or problem changes (for example, the problem is resolved or the situation gets worse);
- stay in contact and ask questions if you do not understand what VOPA is trying to do for you; and
- let VOPA know as soon as possible if you do not want or need our help anymore.

Complaint/Appeal Process

If you are not happy because of something we did or did not do, you can make a complaint. Anyone that applies for our services may make a complaint. This can be done by a phone call, if you wish.

An appeal is when you contact us in writing, to let us know that you did not like our action or decision. You may file an appeal if:

- you think that we should have given you some type of service;
- you are not happy with the service that we did provide you;
- you think we did not meet our legal obligation to you; or
- you think we discriminated against you because of your disability, race, or another reason.

Areas VOPA Does Not Address:

VOPA does not address issues related to criminal charges, immigration, family law, or issues for which you already have an attorney. VOPA may be able to provide a referral in those areas that it does not address.

Community Voice:

Advisory Councils: VOPA sponsors two advisory councils. These councils provide input to VOPA on problems faced by persons with disabilities and suggests areas in which VOPA might focus its work.

The two councils are:

- Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Advisory Council (comprised of individuals who have received or are receiving mental health services and their family members, attorneys, mental health professionals, individuals knowledgeable about mental illness, and providers of mental health services).
- Disabilities Advisory Council (comprised of individuals with disabilities who are eligible for disability-related services, who received or are receiving disability-related services, parents, family members, guardians, advocates, or authorized representatives).

The councils meet about four times a year. Council members are reimbursed for travel and lodging expenses. Individuals interested in participating on a council should contact VOPA.

Speakers Bureau: Another area in which VOPA provides outreach to the disability community is through its Speakers Bureau. The Speakers Bureau is available to provide information, literature, or presentations at events, exhibits, fairs, and conferences throughout the state. Contact VOPA for more information.

**Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy
Contact Information**

**1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5
Richmond, Virginia 23230
800-552-3962 (Toll-Free in Virginia)
(Voice and TTY)
804-225-2042 (Voice and TTY)
Fax: 804-662-7057
E-Mail: general.vopa@vopa.virginia.gov
Web: www.vopa.state.va.us**

All information or service requests will be treated in a confidential manner.

Applicants for service or employment shall be afforded equal opportunity without regard to race, color, religion, political affiliation, national origin, disability, marital status, gender, or age.

***VOPA publications are available in alternate format,
upon request.***