

Vermont Agency of Human Services
Department of Mental Health

**INVOLUNTARY
TRANSPORTATION
MANUAL AND STANDARDS**

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Department of Mental Health
Involuntary Transportation: Manual and Standards

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1. Introduction

State law requires that the Department of Mental Health ensure that all reasonable and appropriate measures are taken in the interest of the safety of individuals and the public when transporting individuals who are under the care and custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health. This includes transport to inpatient psychiatric units from another facility and travel to and from medical appointments during an inpatient admission, or discharge from a psychiatric placement to another setting.

There are three primary guiding principles to providing safe and humane transportation. Transports should be conducted in a way that:

- respects the privacy of the person in custody;
- is the least restrictive means necessary for safety; and
- reduces the likelihood of physical and psychological trauma.

Sheriff departments or secure transportation contractors provide transportation for individuals under the Commissioner's care and custody. If the entity providing transportation determines that the use of mechanical restraints is necessary, the reason for such a determination shall be documented in writing. It is the policy of the State of Vermont that mechanical restraints are used as the last option when it is deemed that a person requires restraints for their transportation to be completed safely. The least restrictive form of transportation clinically appropriate should always be used. A law enforcement or secure transportation company shall have soft restraints available for use as a first option, and mechanical restraints shall not be used as a substitute for soft restraints if the soft restraints are otherwise deemed adequate for safety.

2. Definitions

- Humane Transport – Defined as the least restrictive mode of transport consistent with safety needs.
- Transport Authority – Designated by the Commissioner and can authorize the method of transport for those under the custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health
- Restraints (Metal, Soft) – only mechanical restraints included in this document *(any restraint outside of typical vehicle safety is considered restraint and should be reported)
 - Metal Restraints – Handcuffs and/or leg irons and/or waist chains. No metal restraints shall be utilized without permission of sheriff or designated supervisor for the entire transport.
 - Soft Restraints – No specific permission is needed to use soft restraints. Soft restraints include polyurethane.

3. Standards and Protocol for Transportation

Pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 751, transport and escort for individuals in the custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health (in this protocol, referred to as individuals) shall be done in a manner which prevents physical and psychological trauma, respects the privacy of the individual, and represents the least restrictive means necessary for the safety of the individual.

Restraints shall be used during transport only if an individual poses a risk of harm to self or others and a less restrictive alternative is not clinically appropriate.

When transportation is provided for individuals currently under the Commissioner's care and custody to and from court appearances, the transport is directed and ordered by the court. Individuals scheduled for a court appearance must be afforded the same right to the least restrictive transport that is clinically appropriate.

3.1 Special Protocol for Children and Youth

It is the expectation of the Department of Mental Health that all involuntary transports of children and youth are provided in the least restrictive manner clinically indicated, such as by family, ambulance, secure transport company, or specially designated-sheriff alternative vans in plain clothes.

When a child under the age of ten (10) in the custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health is transported by sheriffs *and it is proposed that this child will be transported with any form of restraints*, the Commissioner of Mental Health or his/her designee must be reached via the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) Admissions Department to provide approval based on the clinical situation. VPCH Admissions is available 24-hours a day at 802-828-2799. The usual and customary paperwork and process outlined below must still be completed. Restraints may not be used unless this step has occurred.

3.2 Guidelines for Clinical Teams

1. Assess the individual's clinical needs as related to the transport.
 - A Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP) or medical staff determines the method for transportation based on the individual's clinical presentation.
 - Clinical staff must take into consideration information provided regarding transport needs from client-identified supporters, such as advocates, family and/or friends.
 - If the client has received sedating medication, and if medical monitoring is necessary, an ambulance should be considered as a mode of transport. DMH does not contract with ambulance companies; this can be set up by the hospital or the Designated Agency's emergency services team.
2. Determine the clinically appropriate Transport Authority.
 - Individuals who are evaluated as requiring metal-restraint transport can receive transportation only via sheriff.
 - Sheriff transports: The Agency of Human Services (AHS) contracts with sheriff departments that are trained in a trauma- informed approach. Sheriffs are expected to use no restraints, or soft restraints, whenever possible. The Sheriff department will follow its policy for transport.
 - Individuals who are evaluated as not requiring restraints must receive transportation from the least restrictive means that is clinically appropriate, which is determined and coordinated by the sending facility, including from:
 - Family/guardian
 - Secure transport contractor

- Ambulance with ambulance personnel only, or a trained transporter as ride-along, or a sheriff ride-along
 - Sheriff's department
- 3. Schedule the transport.
 - If sheriffs or the secure transport contractor are needed to provide transportation, call the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) Admissions Department at 802-828-2799 (phone). VPCH Admissions will require clinical and demographic information from the clinical team at the sending facility team to complete necessary transport paperwork.
- 4. Communicate to the Transport Authority.
 - Provide pertinent clinical information to the Transport Authority upon arrival to support them in understanding the individual's needs during the transport.
- 5. Once the individual has left the facility with the Transport Authority, contact VPCH Admissions at 802-828-2799 (phone) to confirm that the individual has left.

3.3 Guidelines for Transport Authority

1. Obtain pertinent clinical information to provide a safe transport for the individual.
 - Clinical information regarding the individual in the care and custody of the Commissioner must be communicated from the discharging clinical team to the Transport Authority, and from the Transport Authority to staff at the admitting facility. Clinical staff take into consideration information provided regarding transport needs from client-identified supporters, such as advocates, family, and friends. This information shall be shared with the Transport Authority upon arrival.
2. Meet with the individual.
 - The Transport Authority shall greet the individual who will be transported.
 - It is recommended that the Transport Authority introduce themselves to the individual who will be receiving transportation, begin to establish some rapport, and provide information about the plan for the transport (such as destination, vehicle that will be used, expected length of travel time, etc.).
3. Assess the need for use of restraints.
 - A person in the care & custody of the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Mental Health must be evaluated on the need for restrained transport by either a mental health clinician or medical staff.
 - The Transport Authority shall speak with clinical or medical staff who have been working with the individual, personally observe their behavior, and discuss transport options with the individual whenever possible.
 - Only a sheriff can use metal restraints for transport. If the Transport Authority is not a sheriff and they determine that transport is not safe without metal restraints, the hospital shall arrange for a sheriff to transport the individual by calling VPCH Admissions at 802-828-2799.
4. Speak with the individual about their immediate needs.
 - Personal biological needs, such as using the restroom or eating, should be accessed prior to transport to decrease the need for stopping along the way.
 - Transport Authority will check with facility staff and the individual regarding any belongings on their person that would compromise safety.
 - The discharging facility must inform the Transport Authority of any of the individual's special medication orders for emergencies (i.e. inhalers, epi-pen).

5. Conducting transport

- The Transport Authority shall accompany the individual to the back seat of the transportation vehicle. Safety locks will be engaged.
- The Transport Authority will put all the individual's personal belongings in a designated, secure space in the vehicle (either the front seat or the trunk of car).
- If the Transport Authority is providing a round-trip transport, they are expected to remain on-site until the individual is ready for their return travel, and to communicate with staff at each location upon their departure and arrival.
- The Transport Authority shall notify the destination facility or VPCH admissions of when they are expected to arrive.
- If there is a concern about safety prior to arrival at the admitting facility, the Transport Authority shall call ahead to advise that arrival is imminent and receive direction regarding point of entry and destination.
- If the individual exhibits an imminent threat of harm at any point during the transport, the driver will call for assistance from law enforcement and travel to the side of the road to bring the vehicle to a stop.
 - Advise police of vehicle identification information and your location. If necessary for safety, remove keys from ignition and exit vehicle, while utilizing verbal communication skills to reassure the individual or assist them in regaining emotional and/or behavioral regulation.

4. Contact Information

- Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH): 802-828-2799 (phone), 802-828-2749 (fax).

5. References

5.1 Reference Materials

18 V.S.A. § 7511 - <http://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes>