



# OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET

## Performance Management Review

### Office of Vital Records

*Last Updated: November 26, 2024*

## Executive Summary

As established in RIGL § 23-3, the Office of Vital Records (Vital Records) within the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is responsible for the management and maintenance of records related to Rhode Island births, deaths, and marriages. The office partners with Rhode Island's 39 municipalities to facilitate the issuance of these documents from the city or town clerks' offices. In 2023, 108,686 total records requests were processed. Approximately 38 percent of these transactions (41,357) were processed by RIDOH Vital Records staff and 62 percent (67,329) were processed by municipal employees.

This report provides an overview of the customer service-oriented vital records work performed by state and municipal staff. This report does not address civil registration or data collection and dissemination performed in the state Office of Vital Records. It discusses the policies, procedures, and roles associated with the office's issuance of birth, death, and marriage records. It covers topics including transaction channels, public communication, methods of payment, municipal processes, and records management, retention, and digitization. High-level findings on the topics contained in the report and recommendations for improvements are listed below.

The first draft of this report was delivered to the Vital Records management in June 2024, and the office has since taken steps to address many of the recommendations in this report.

### **Transaction Channels**

Currently, any Rhode Islander can obtain their vital records online through multiple online portals, in-person or by mail from the state Vital Records office, the city or town where the event occurred, and, in some cases, any city or town (from certain years only).

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- **Direct Customers to Efficient Channels:** At every available opportunity, customers should be directed to the most efficient and/or convenient transaction channel.
- **Enhance Communication of Online Options:** The ability to order records online should be more clearly communicated by both the state and municipalities.
- **Adopt Appointment Scheduling:** Vital Records should use an online scheduling tool.

### **Public Communication**

Vital Records provides a range of prominent public-facing services, and effective communication is integral to its efficient business operations. This communication is facilitated through multiple channels, including the internet, telephone, forms (online/in-person), and at in-person locations at the Office of Vital Records and municipalities.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- **Website Reviews:** RIDOH should conduct regular reviews of the Vital Records site.
- **Standardize Forms:** Vital Records' request forms should be standardized and unified across the State and municipalities.
- **Automate Phone Systems:** Vital Records should explore the implementation of an automated phone system with pre-recorded prompts and call forwarding.

### **Methods of Payment**

Vital Records accepts various forms of payment depending on the transaction channel. Mail-in transactions allow for check or money order, while online transactions through VitalChek accept check, debit card, or credit card. In-person transactions can be conducted with cash, checks, money orders, and select credit cards (Mastercard, Visa, and Discover).

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- **Consistent Payment Information:** Vital Records should provide clear and consistent information regarding payment methods for in-person transactions.
- **Fee Structure Amendments:** RIDOH should explore proposing amendments to the

Vital Records fee structure to more closely reflect internal operational costs.

- Uniform Payment Experience: Rhode Island State Government should establish a uniform experience for customer payments across all state agencies and units.

## **Municipal Processes**

The Performance Management Unit distributed a brief survey to municipal clerks about their processes and recommendations for improvements. Thirty-two of 39 municipalities responded to the survey, revealing inconsistencies in service offerings and payment methods.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Promote Online Ordering: Over half of municipal survey responses did not state online ordering exists. Clerks should be made aware of, and promote, this option to residents.
- Consistent Payment Methods: Standardize payment methods and fees across municipalities to avoid customer confusion and frustration.
- Annual Reviews: Perform annual reviews of municipal websites to ensure accuracy of information and forms.

## **Records Management, Retention, and Digitization**

Most of the records in Vital Records custody are physical paper documents, and many of the oldest records are in fragile condition. These paper records are stored in a locked and climate-controlled environment. The digitization project is on hold pending renewed funding.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Assess Public Record Amendments: The state should assess its options in restricting amendments of public records that are over 100 years old.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis: RIDOH should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to guide the completion of the digitization and imaging processes.

## **Conclusion**

The State Office of Vital Records manages a critical function within Rhode Island's public health infrastructure, ensuring the accurate and efficient handling of vital records. By implementing the recommendations provided in this report, the office can enhance service efficiency, accessibility, and reliability for Rhode Islanders.



# OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET

## Performance Management Review

### Office of Vital Records

*Last Updated: July 8, 2024*

## Introduction, Scope, and Methodology

This report provides an overview of the customer service-oriented work performed by the Office of Vital Records (Vital Records), situated within the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). It discusses the policies, procedures, and roles associated with the office's issuance of birth, death and marriage records. This report does not address civil registration or data collection and dissemination performed in the state Office of Vital Records.

As part of this evaluation, the report includes sections on methods of conducting transactions, public communication, methods of payments, fees, state office operations, municipal processes, record retention, and digitization. The objective of this report is to assess the current state of Vital Records and propose suggestions for improvement. Each section concludes with findings and recommendations, a comprehensive listing of which can be found in Appendix A. It should be noted that the first draft of this report was completed and delivered to the Vital Records staff in June 2024, and since that time Vital Records has taken steps to address many of the recommendations in this report.

The development of this report included: interviewing staff from Vital Records, municipal clerk offices, RIDOH, the Secretary of State's office, and Enterprise Technology Strategy and Services (ETSS) within the Department of Administration (DOA); conducting extended observations at Vital Records' offices regarding their processes; and reviewing state laws and regulations for compliance and applicability. Additionally, the Performance Management Unit distributed a survey to all municipal clerks and conducted research to identify national best practices. Furthermore, the team analyzed 10 years of Vital Records' order data.

In addition to the services described in this report, Vital Records manages a system

responsible for data collection from external stakeholders (e.g., hospitals, healthcare providers, funeral homes) The State Office of Vital Records is charged with civil registration for the State of Rhode Island, This office also manages other complex vital records processes such as amending existing records, processing adoptions, foreign adoption, voluntary acknowledgements of parentage, and legitimations. Vital Records assists local, state and federal law enforcement with investigations. The policies and procedures related to these other office functions are beyond the scope of this engagement.

## Background and Overview

As established in [RIGL § 23-3](#), RIDOH's Office of Vital Records is responsible for the management and maintenance of records related to Rhode Island births, deaths, and marriages.

The Office of Vital Records is located in Simpson Hall on the John O. Pastore Center Campus in Cranston. This office serves as the hub for both internal and customer-facing operations. It is staffed by 15 state full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) and five contractors (see organizational chart in Appendix B). Approximately half of this staff conduct customer service-related operations and support, which is the focus of this report.

In FY 2024, Vital Records' budget was \$2.6 million (\$1.2 million General Revenue, \$1.4 million Federal Funds). In addition to providing standard vital record services (issuance of certified copies), the Office of Vital Records is the sole office in Rhode Island that can handle more complex requests, including record amendments.

In addition, Vital Records provides training and guidance to municipal clerks who handle vital records requests received at each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns. [RIGL § 23-3-5](#) charges the State Registrar of Vital Records or their delegate to "direct, supervise, and control the activities of local registrars and the activities of town and city clerks related to the operation of the vital records system."

In fulfillment of these statutory responsibilities, Vital Records provides updated forms, reference materials, and periodically provides virtual training to municipal clerks. It also

supplies each municipality with the necessary “security paper” required by federal law to print certified copies of vital records. This paper is provided to cities and towns at no cost.

Vital Records is generally responsible for birth and marriage records issued within the last 100 years and death records issued within the last 50 years. These records are considered “closed” (non-public) and can only be accessed by people with “direct access” or a “tangible interest” in the record, including the subject of the record, a member of their immediate family, their guardian, or an authorized agent. Once records reach the age where they become “open” (public), they are transferred to the State Archives and are available to anyone, as required by [RIGL § 23-3-5.1](#).

Until 2004, individuals seeking a copy of a closed vital record, such as a birth certificate, marriage certificate, or death certificate, could only obtain it from the city or town where the event occurred or from Vital Records. Since that time, Vital Records converted hundreds of thousands of paper records to electronic records, enabling all municipalities to process requests for records of events that occurred outside their jurisdiction. Through the unified statewide Rhode Island Vital Events Registration System (RIVERS), all cities and towns can now process:

- Rhode Island birth records from 1960-onward
- Rhode Island death records from January 2022-onward
- Rhode Island marriage records from April 2022-onward

## Volume

In CY 2023, the Vital Records staff processed over 41,000 total records requests, which averages to 160 requests per business day. Of these, 7,000 were in-person transactions, averaging 28 per business day. As shown below, cities and towns processed an additionally 67, 329 records requests.

2023 Transaction Data

	In-person	Mail	Online	Misc.**	Total	% of Total
RIDOH Vital Records	7,148	5,647	26,510	2,052	41,357	38.1%
Municipalities	65,467	1,862	N/A*	N/A	67,329	61.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,615</b>	<b>7,509</b>	<b>26,510</b>	<b>2,052</b>	<b>108,686</b>	

\*Municipalities report online requests under "mail."

\*\*Miscellaneous includes special issuance of vital records requested by non-profit organizations, transactions incurred between Vital Records and municipalities, and Electronic Verification of Vital Events (EVVE) confirmation presented by an applicant to a government office

This data highlights that Vital Records manages a high volume of requests, and there has been a significant increase in recent years. Comparing the three-year period of 2015-2017 to 2021-2023, the average annual transaction count increased by approximately 45 percent.

Vital Records directly processed 38 percent of the 108,686 total vital record requests (the remainder was handled by all 39 town clerks' offices), making it the single busiest "storefront" for vital records in the state (see Appendix C for full breakdown of transaction volume, by office).

### **Transaction Channels**

The Vital Records Office, in partnership with Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, provides a critical set of services at a very high volume. As a result, it is necessary to have a variety of well-managed transaction channels so that (1) Rhode Islanders are able to quickly and conveniently obtain the records they need, and (2) Vital Records staff can be deployed in the most efficient manner. Currently, any Rhode Islander can obtain their vital records through the following:

- Online through VitalChek and select municipal online systems,
- In-person or by mail from:
  - the state Vital Records office,
  - the city or town where the event occurred, and
  - any city or town (certain years only)<sup>1</sup>

Despite this high volume of requests and the multitude of channels available, Vital Records reports rarely having a backlog of outstanding requests. Vital Records states that most requests received directly through online orders are processed by the next business day, and in-person requests are handled same-day. Mail orders are typically processed within one to two weeks. Other states reported backlogs on their websites, some as long as fifteen

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<sup>1</sup> While this review did not include a comprehensive review of other states' operations, several Rhode Island birth records from 1960-onward; Rhode Island death records from January 2022-onward; and Rhode Island marriage records from April 2022-onward

weeks.

### **Online Transactions**

Online ordering is the most commonly used customer channel of Vital Records. In calendar year (CY) 2023, Vital Records processed 26,510 of its requests online, accounting for 64 percent of total requests. Vital Records has a contractual arrangement with VitalChek, a subsidiary of LexisNexis, to handle online vital record requests. The online orders are systematically shared with Vital Records for processing, after which Vital Records mails the certified records to the requesters. The State Office of Vital Records contracts with VitalChek due to the service's enhanced user identification controls and the added security features with payment protection, since the service absorbs any losses from chargebacks, checks returned for insufficient funds, and other forms of erroneous payment. VitalChek also serves as a standardized clearinghouse for vital records across the United States.

Alternatively, 10 municipalities have adopted an 'RI.gov'-branded ordering platform through egov.com. When a customer requests a vital record through this platform, the municipal clerks in the town from which they are ordering receive an emailed copy of the completed application. The order is then processed as a mail request. Additionally, six municipalities have partnered with Permittium Software to manage online requests in a similar manner.

### **In-Person Transactions**

In CY 2023, Vital Records received over 7,000 in-person vital record requests, while more than 65,000 orders were placed by walk-in customers at municipal offices. Customers needing essential vital records can visit either the State Office of Vital Records or the relevant municipal office. Although it is difficult to analyze the needs of every transaction using only RIVERS data, a cursory review indicates that more than half of the in-person record requests at Vital Records could have theoretically been handled through an online portal or at a municipal office. Not only are these alternative modes of request more efficient for Vital Records, but they are also likely more convenient for most customers.

RIDOH's website stated that in-person Vital Records transactions are to be conducted "by

appointment only” (this was updated on the website in February 2024). In practice, however, unscheduled walk-in customers are accepted on a first- come, first-served basis.

Approximately two-thirds of the customers served on any given day are from unscheduled walk-ins. To make an appointment, a customer must speak with a member of Vital Records staff by phone and be placed on the calendar. Currently, there is no public online scheduling option. Although providing a walk-in option may be an essential public service, Vital Records considers all in-person (scheduled and walk-in) requests to be its least efficient transaction channel for both staff and customers.

Using an online schedule system for in-person appointments, which is becoming increasingly common for government services, may be the optimal mode to manage walk-in customers. A

Performance Management Unit review of 25 states’ vital records websites (see Appendix D) found that five states (20 percent) currently offer self-directed online appointment scheduling tools on their sites. However, even if Vital Records maintains its current hybrid-practice it should communicate it more accurately to its customers.

### **Mail & Drop Box Transactions**

In CY 2023, Vital Records received over 5,600 orders for vital records by mail, while municipalities received more than 1,800 mail requests. Despite processing records within one to two weeks, customers are advised on the Vital Records website to expect their orders within eight to twelve weeks due to mail delays.<sup>2</sup> Vital Records also offers a \$7 rush option that is estimated to take five to seven business days.

Vital Records also offers a drop-off option for requests in the drop box at its location in Cranston. Staff regularly collect and process these requests. Once the certified records are ready, the customer is notified that curbside pick-up is available, if preferred.

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<sup>2</sup> As of June 2024, the Vital Records website has been updated with the processing time of one to two weeks. However, the website review conducted in April 2024 previously listed the inaccurate, longer processing time.

## Findings and Recommendations – Transactions Channels

At every available opportunity, customers should be directed to the most efficient and/or convenient transaction channel. In CY 2023, approximately half of the services provided by State Vital Records related to certified copies of birth, death, and marriage certificates. While Vital Records should serve every customer without hesitation, every reasonable effort should be made to communicate that most transactions can be performed at local municipal offices and/or online. The Office of Vital Records should primarily focus on amendments and complex services that municipalities are not authorized to handle.

The ability to order records online should be more clearly communicated, by both the state and municipalities. Currently, over 50 percent of municipalities do not offer and/or indicate the existence of an online option to order vital records. Meanwhile, those that do offer online options use three different ordering systems (VitalChek, Permittium, eGov order form), each with its own processing fees. This results in inconsistent fees for Rhode Islanders for the same transaction type, which for many records could be obtained from any of the systems. At a minimum, municipalities need to state that an online option is available either at the local or state level and should provide a link or mention the VitalChek option through the state.

Vital Records should deploy an online appointment scheduling tool. Some states currently offer an online appointment scheduling tool on their Vital Records websites. For instance, Hawaii uses a scheduling tool developed with Microsoft Forms, which appears sleek and integrates with Outlook, both of which are software that Rhode Island state government agencies already possess.

## Public Communication

The Office of Vital Records provides a range of prominent public-facing services, and as a result effective communication is integral to efficient business operations. It is imperative that communication be clear, comprehensive, accurate, and succinct so that customers can complete their transactions efficiently and with as little confusion as possible. This

communication is facilitated through multiple channels, including the internet, telephone, forms (online/in-person), and at in-person locations at the State Office of Vital Records and municipalities.

### **Website/Internet**

In CY 2023, the Vital Records website ([health.ri.gov/records](http://health.ri.gov/records)) averaged over 1,000 daily page views, making it one of RIDOH's most visited websites. As of an April 2024 review, the site experienced considerable usability issues, including a confusing navigation interface, inactive links, and outdated content. A significant problem was the presence of numerous translated COVID-19 forms in the center of the homepage that were no longer accessible.

When these issues were reported to Vital Records, the dead links were promptly removed. However, the site continues to be difficult to navigate due to the prioritization of content. Training materials for RIVERS are readily visible on the desktop landing page, yet the link to obtain a copy of a record—the most frequented page after the homepage—requires detailed scrutiny of the site. This link is not prominently displayed and uses a smaller font than most of the site's text. Additionally, other important information about services is only accessible through an orange oval, which may not be immediately recognizable as a clickable button (see screenshot, Appendix E).

The staff and leadership at Vital Records described their awareness of the site's deficiencies and had already reached out to the RIDOH communications team to overhaul the site. Supporting this initiative, the Performance Management Unit met with RIDOH's webmaster and conducted a review of 25 state vital records websites, identifying best practices and several features crucial to the success of such sites. The findings of this review are detailed in Appendix F and were provided to RIDOH's web team for consideration.

Beyond RIDOH-managed websites, there is a considerable amount of erroneous information about Vital Records on the Internet. Although Vital Records has been located in Cranston for more than two years (since April 2022), a Google search for "RI Vital Records" still displays a photograph of the sign outside RIDOH's Providence Cannon Building with the

old address prominently displayed (see image).<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, nearly half of Rhode Island municipalities, as well as RIDOH's national partner at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), list the incorrect address on their websites.

According to a recent tally from staff at the Cannon Building, approximately 15 customers per week

mistakenly go to the Cannon Building incorrectly looking for the Office of Vital Records, largely because of this incorrect Google result. Given that so many people make this mistake more than two years after Vital Records relocated to Cranston, it is imperative that address information be as up to date and accurate as possible.

"RI Vital Records" Google Search Results



## Phone

RIDOH's website provides phone numbers for the various programs it oversees. Out of the four phone numbers provided for Vital Records, two phone numbers are for the same RIDOH general phone line (401-222-5960, 401-222-2811), one phone number is out of service (401-222-2813), and one phone number is the direct line to Vital Records (401-222-2812). The disconnected line is also the sole phone number listed on several webpages of municipal and federal partners.

When contacting the main RIDOH information line listed on the website (401-222-5960 or 401-222-2811) during normal business hours, a live operator facilitates the transfer of callers to the appropriate office, based on the subject of their call. As of the drafting of this report, aside from selecting a language, there are no self-service options available. It was communicated by Vital Records staff that the RIDOH information line is in the process of implementing a new system that will offer more self-service options.

At the Office of Vital Records, designated staff monitor daily incoming calls. Given that there are no self-service phone options after being transferred or calling the direct line, a Vital

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<sup>3</sup> As of October 2024, the Google search results have been updated to remove the incorrect photograph. However, the review conducted in April 2024 yielded search results including the incorrect photograph.

Records staff member must answer every call that the office receives, even when the caller is seeking basic information such as address and hours of operation. Based on the nature of inquiries, calls are then directed to the appropriate team or specialist for further assistance. During normal business hours, clerical staff can assist customers, but outside these hours, callers receive only a message instructing them to call back during business hours.

## **Forms**

Customers making in-person, mail, and drop-box requests must fill out and submit the appropriate completed forms to Vital Records or their local municipalities. These forms are available on the Vital Records and city and town websites. Physical copies can be obtained from Vital Records or municipal offices. The forms are regularly updated by Vital Records to ensure accuracy and compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. Although municipalities are provided notification of updated forms, approximately half of the municipalities' websites display outdated forms or brochures that include incorrect information, such as acceptable forms of payment, phone numbers, and office location.

## **Recurring “Wayfinding” Issues**

Through nearly all forms of communication, the Performance Management Unit observed missing and/or inconsistent information. The review identified instances where address, payment method, and services available were described incorrectly. For example, as of April 2024, 18 of the 39 municipalities listed the incorrect State Vital Records address on their website, either in forms, brochures, or on the site itself. As a result, customers are not able to complete their transactions as efficiently or conveniently as possible.

## **Findings and Recommendations – Public Communication**

RIDOH should conduct regular reviews of the Vital Records website. A regular review of the website should include analyzing web traffic and engagement metrics, auditing content for accuracy and relevance, and conducting usability testing with real users to identify navigational challenges. Additionally, a technical review should be carried out to address issues like broken links, slow loading pages, and optimize search engine visibility. To ensure

customers are provided the necessary information to conduct their transactions through the most efficient and/or convenient channel available, Vital Records should state clearly on its website categories of records that can be ordered through municipalities and list the addresses and phone numbers of each municipal clerk's office.

RIDOH should routinely check websites that share information about Vital Records to ensure they are accurate and up to date. This involves making sure these websites correctly describe what Vital Records does and where it is located. If any incorrect or outdated information is found, RIDOH should ask the webmasters to make the necessary corrections or updates. For example, RIDOH should ensure that websites of municipalities, search engine results like Google, and major sites like the CDC reflect correct details. This helps keep all publicly available information about Vital Records consistent and reliable, supporting the credibility of their own website.

Vital Records' request forms should be standardized and unified across the State and municipalities. As of April 2024, nearly half of municipalities listed the incorrect State Vital Records address on their website, either in forms, brochures, or on the site itself. To regulate the customer service and comply with the laws, rules, and regulations, the State Vital Records should insist municipalities use up-to-date forms or link forms directly in the Vital Records repository in RIVERS.

Vital Records should explore the implementation of an automated phone system with pre-recorded prompts and call forwarding. Such a system would enable customers to self-navigate 24/7 to critical information such as operating hours, appointment scheduling, and online ordering options. During high traffic periods, the system could automatically reroute calls to available cross-trained staff or managers if needed. The implementation of an updated RIDOH information phone line can assist with phone communications, but may require additional investment or feedback from Vital Records in order to offer the aforementioned services. Such a setup would streamline communications, decrease missed calls, and efficiently guide customers to appropriate services or local municipalities, improving overall service delivery.

# Methods of Payment and Fees

## Methods of Payment

Vital Records accepts several different forms of payment that vary depending on the channel of the transaction. Presently, mail-in transactions only allow for check or money order, while online transactions through the third-party vendor VitalChek allow for check, debit card, or credit card. Vital Records' website states that in-person transactions at the Office can be conducted with checks, money orders, and select credit cards (Mastercard, Visa, and Discover). Signage in the waiting area at Vital Records' office lists checks, money orders, and credit cards, but does not mention that they do not accept American Express and do accept debit cards and cash.

Until April 2023, Vital Records accepted cash payments for in-person transactions. This practice ceased when armored truck services for deposit pickups were discontinued. Subsequently, Vital Records office staff had to personally deposit checks and cash at a bank on a weekly basis. As a form of risk control, Vital Records assigned two staff members to perform this responsibility together. Both staff and management expressed discomfort with this arrangement, as it required staff to transport these forms of payment in their personal vehicles. As a result, Vital Records suspended cash transactions in May 2023. Customers intending to pay in cash were advised by staff to purchase a money order at a nearby grocery store and return with their payment.

[RIGL § 6-13.1-30](#) requires all retail establishments in Rhode Island to accept currency as payment. Although other state agencies do not accept cash, this legislation sets the expectation that residents can use cash for payments. Based, in part, on an incident that led to a customer asking for a copy of Vital Records' "written policy" on its no-cash policy, Vital Records resumed accepting cash payments in February 2024. Despite now accepting cash, Vital Records does not currently maintain a petty cash fund, and customers are asked to use alternate payment methods when exact change is unavailable.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> As of June 2024, Vital Records now maintains petty cash to allow for change. However, this was not observed nor the current policy in April 2024 when operations were observed.

The Performance Management Unit observed multiple customers confused about the forms of payment accepted for in-person services at the Office of Vital Records. Referring only to the form and not seeing posted signage, they were unaware that credit cards were an acceptable method of payment. Staff corrected this misconception and informed customers that debit and credit cards were also accepted.

### **Payment Processing**

The state's longstanding payment processor contract is held by Rhode Island Interactive (RII), a subsidiary of Tyler Technologies, managed by the Office of Library Services (OLIS) within DOA. Established in 2001, the contract involves RII processing approximately \$2.2 billion in transactions annually across 25 state agencies and 16 cities and towns under 41 Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Despite the vast scale of this operation, OLIS reported difficulties in maintaining a complete archive of SLAs and fee schedules. Neither OLIS nor RIDOH were able to furnish a copy of the RIDOH SLA or fee schedule. Consequently, OLIS reached out directly to the vendor to retrieve the contractual documentation.

The Performance Management Unit identified considerable variability in accepted payment methods and payment processor fee structures across different state agencies and units, reflecting a fragmented approach that leads to inconsistent service experiences for the public. Differences were evident not only in the types of payments accepted but also in transaction fees, depending on the municipality/office and the specific transaction channel. While this is not directly in the scope of this review, it may be worthy of further evaluation.

### **Pricing and Fees**

The price of each vital records transaction, whether processed by the state office or by a city or town, is set by [RIGL § 23-1-54](#). In addition to the prices for the records themselves, processors have some leeway to charge additional amounts for services like rush delivery or expedited processing. Furthermore, third parties can set their own processing fees. As a result, there can be significant variation in the price a customer might incur, depending on

the online portal used.

For example, the price of a birth certificate can range from \$22 when ordered in-person, to \$30 when ordered online through the eGov portal, and between \$45 and \$75 when ordered through VitalChek, depending on the shipping speed selected. The least expensive and most expedient method to obtain any record is to go in person to the Vital Records Office or to a municipality. However, online options, while more expensive and slower (as they are shipped through the mail rather than handed directly to the customer), incentivize customers to obtain their records in-person, a manner that is the least efficient and most time-consuming for Vital Records staff.

## Findings and Recommendations – Methods of Payment and Fees

Vital Records should provide clear and consistent information regarding payment methods for in-person transactions. Currently, there are disparities between forms, signs, verbal communication, and what is accepted at the in-person location. This leads to confusion for customers and can result in them using a less favored method of payment when their preferred one is actually an option. In-person forms, signage, and verbal communication should provide the same information – which should also be consistent with the established policies.

RIDOH should explore the possibility of proposing amendments to the Vital Records fee structure to more closely reflect internal operational costs. [RIGL § 23-3-25](#) establishes the base fees for copies of records, which are standardized across all transaction channels (online, mail, in-person). However, additional processing fees exist for mail-in and online orders, which are more efficient for Vital Records than in-person orders. By amending cost structure by transaction channel, fees can be made to more closely align with the costs of the processes. This can encourage customers to use channels that are more cost-effective and efficient for the state and municipalities.

An inventory of all payment processing contracts should be conducted by OLIS. OMB's request for the RIDOH Vital Records payment processing contract and service level agreement demonstrated issues in current documentation, as neither RIDOH nor OLIS could

locate a copy. Instead, the vendor had to provide a copy.

Rhode Island State Government should establish a uniform experience for customer payments across all state agencies and units. Currently, the process varies significantly from agency to agency and even between different units in an agency. Customers must deal with a variety of fees and a patchwork of forms of acceptable payment. Offering uniform payment methods can improve the ease of payment and increase customer satisfaction.

## Vital Records Office Operations

### **Business Process**

The State Office of Vital Records at the Pastore Complex is open to the public on business days from 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM. Vital Records shares a lobby area with BHDDH, which is also located in Simpson Hall. The location provides the public with a waiting area in the lobby, which is staffed by a contracted security guard. At the request of customers, Vital Records staff can also provide public access to private rooms for consultations. There is no public restroom available, and customers are directed to the DMV office if requested.

Each morning, management prepares an operations schedule that details daily roles and responsibilities for staff. Typically, one staff member is assigned to greet customers, while three additional customer service operational support associates assist with in-person vital records services. Leadership at Vital Records reported that staff sometimes needs to remain beyond closure to finish serving customers.

A process map of the following walk-in record request process can be found in Appendix G.

During normal business hours, visitors arriving at the main entrance to Simpson Hall must press a doorbell. A privately contracted security guard grants access to the building and directs them to press a second doorbell next to the Vital Records office area. Members of the Vital Records team expressed the preference for the presence of a Capitol Police officer instead of the security guard for security purposes related to customer behavior.

Upon ringing the bell, a State Vital Records customer service representative meets the

customers to inquire about the purpose of their visit. Depending on the request, the representative provides the appropriate form for the customers to fill out in the waiting area. If the customer has a pre-scheduled appointment, the staff consults a printed appointment schedule taped to the wall and notifies the designated specialist of the customer's arrival. Walk-in customers are assisted by an available expert on the relevant subject matter.

The assigned staff then either discuss the request with the customer in the waiting area or take the customer to a private consultation room. After completing the necessary forms, the staff collect customer identification documents to verify information and determine authorization using the RIVERS system. The staff collect the payment from the customer and take it down a hallway to a designated cashier for processing. If the requested document is found and/or the information is successfully amended in RIVERS, a certified document is printed. To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the records, a quality assurance staff member reviews and validates the certified documents. Finally, the staff return the IDs and payment method to the customer, along with the certified records. If the service cannot be completed, the staff either suggest a new visit or provide the customer with a reason for redirection.

It should be noted that Vital Records is in the process of installing a new customer service center in their waiting area. It will provide customers with more privacy while making their requests, and allow employees to process requests without repeatedly having to leave the service center. Vital Records anticipates that the new service center will be up and running by the end of 2024.

## Findings and Recommendations – Vital Records Office Operations

Vital Records should work to optimize efficiency in its anticipated customer service center.

Vital Records staff currently navigate multiple steps to process transactions, traveling to several areas within the office. Once the new customer service center is implemented, Vital Records will benefit from external assistance to streamline operational processes and

maximize efficiency.<sup>5</sup> The OMB's Performance Management Unit can assist Vital Records with process improvement evaluations and planning, after the installation of the customer service center furniture.

## Municipal Vital Records Processes

All municipalities issue birth, death, and marriage certificates for events that occurred within their jurisdiction and are recorded in the online RIVERS system. Municipalities do not require appointments for obtaining these records. However, significant variation exists among municipal office processes.

### Inconsistencies Among Municipalities

The Performance Management Unit distributed a brief survey to municipal clerks about their processes and recommendations for improvements. Thirty-two of 39 municipalities responded to the survey and the results were as follows:

- Two municipalities reported in a survey that they did not offer all record types (birth, death, and marriage records) that Vital Records indicates should be available universally at all municipal locations.
- Over half of municipalities do not mention online ordering as an option at either the state or municipal level. In fact, 21 municipalities in the survey indicated that records from their municipality could not be ordered online through a state system. When the Performance Management team inquired by phone, 18 municipal clerks stated that no online system exists in the state for ordering records. One municipal clerk stated, "the state does not allow for online ordering."

Payment methods and fees also vary between municipalities for the same services. [RIGL § 23-3-25](#) establishes a base fee for all vital records, which is adhered to, but the final charge to customers can vary significantly based on the selected payment method and location. For example, some municipalities do not charge a credit card fee, while others charge several

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<sup>5</sup> As of October 2024, construction of the Customer Service Center is mostly completed, with an anticipated opening date of December 2024.

dollars for the same type of transaction.

Furthermore, the information provided to the public about payment methods is inconsistent across different sources. Municipal websites, phone inquiries, and survey results yielded contradictory information. Out of 39 municipalities, 27 (70 percent) had at least one form of payment listed differently on their website compared to what a clerk provided over the phone. This inconsistency can cause significant confusion and frustration for residents attempting to obtain a copy of their record. Only 9 out of 32 municipalities that responded (28 percent) were fully consistent in their payment methods across all three information sources.

An additional breakdown on payment method inconsistencies is provided in the table below.

Inconsistencies for Payment Methods for Municipalities				
Comparison	Fully Consistent	1+ Inconsistency	2+ Inconsistencies	3+ Inconsistencies
Website vs. Call	38%	63%	34%	19%
Website vs. Survey	31%	69%	44%	19%
Call vs. Survey	53%	47%	19%	6%
All (Website, Call, Survey)	28%	72%	47%	22%

Note: This data only contains the 32 municipalities that responded to the survey.

Additionally, the forms used by municipalities often contain inconsistencies. While most forms adhere to the template provided by the state, they fail to account for the varied payment methods and associated fees at each municipality. As noted, 18 out of 39 municipalities (46 percent) have incorrect address information for the State Vital Records location on their websites or on forms and pamphlets currently available as of March 2024.

### Security Paper

Municipalities print customers' record requests on "security paper" provided to them by Vital Records at no cost. This paper, which is required by law for issuing certified copies of vital records, has a unique serial number on each sheet that must be tracked and accounted for by Vital Records staff. Vital Records distributes the security paper quarterly to each city, basing the allotment on expected usage.

Until November 2023, municipalities were required to pick up their allotment from the Vital

Records office. Currently, Vital Records staff deliver the allotments to all 39 cities and towns using their personal vehicles. The option of having the security paper delivered directly to each town was explored but deemed cost-prohibitive. Delivering security paper in this manner is time-consuming and presents potential risks, given the value of the material and the serious consequences associated with its misuse.

## Findings and Recommendations – Municipal Vital Records Processes

Vital Records should leverage its supervisory powers to reduce inconsistencies in municipal processes related to vital records. It was found through direct communication with Rhode Island cities and towns more than two thirds of municipalities exhibited at least one inconsistency in the information between their websites and what was conveyed through phone inquiry and the municipal survey. Basic questions posed about RIVERS and other documents at the annual online training session demonstrated the need for more regular training sessions and/or additional reference materials to address important questions. Additionally, RIDOH should perform an annual review of municipal websites to ensure the accuracy of the information and forms.

A consistent cost per transaction channel should be established across all municipalities. Under the current patchwork system, the full cost (including processing fees) to obtain the same certificate varies by municipality, although many of those records are retrievable at any location.

Vital Records should explore other delivery options for security paper. The current delivery system, which involves Vital Records staff using their personal vehicles to transport boxes of security paper to municipalities each quarter, introduces unnecessary risk and may be placing undue burdens on employees.

## Records Management, Retention and Digitization

The Office of Vital Records performs a wide variety of important functions that involve

producing and maintaining critically important documentation as part of their core functions. [RIGL § 23-3](#) requires that most of the records produced must be preserved permanently and remain confidential and in the Vital Records' custody for a predetermined number of years (birth and marriage records for 100 years; death records for 50 years). After such time, the records become public and are transferred into the custody of the state archives under the Secretary of State. Each year Vital Records and the State Archivist work together to manage the transfer all the newly eligible records.

Most of the records in Vital Records custody are physical paper documents, and many of the oldest records are in fragile condition. These paper records are stored in a locked and climate-controlled environment. This concentration of physical records, especially records that are old, fragile, and have historic importance, creates risk because they cannot be replaced in the event of loss or destruction.

Vital Records and the State Archivist also work together when a customer needs to amend a record that have been transferred to the archivist's control. For example, someone may need to amend a vital record of one of their ancestors to correct an error or inconsistent spelling in order to complete a citizenship application. Individuals who want to make these kinds of amendments can only do so if they've first received a court order. Even though these records are in the custody of the state archives, [RIGL § 23-3-21](#) authorizes only the state registrar of vital records to amend a vital record. In practice, this approach requires a significant amount of work on the part of the staffs of both Vital Records and the State Archivist. For this to occur, one of the Vital Records managers needs to leave the office and physically perform and record the amendment at the state archives offices in downtown Providence, taking the manager away from his/her duties for almost an entire day. Vital Records staff indicate that they receive on average two such transactions per month, often from customers who need very old birth or death records to process a passport application.

According to Vital Records staff and the State Archivist, some states<sup>6</sup> do not allow the amending of records in the state archives. Instead, these states produce the original un-

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<sup>6</sup> Rhode Island's State Archivist surveyed all US states about this practice and received ten responses. Seven respondents (70 percent) reported that they do not amend records in the custody of the state archives.

amended record with a letter explaining that the state cannot perform these amendments.

In 2019, Vital Records began digitizing their existing paper records to create a system that would allow them to generate digitized records electronically. The current status:

- Marriage records from 1960-2020, death records from 1970-2020, and birth records from 1940-1959 have been digitized; and
- Marriage and death records from 2022-present, and birth records from 1960-present are available electronically.

The digitization project is on hold pending renewed funding. Based on an estimate from the vendor, it would cost approximately \$300,000 to finish digitizing the remaining records. In order to have a fully operable digital vital records system, the Office of Vital Records would also need to implement an imaging system which would facilitate creating digital amendments. The estimated cost of the imaging system is an additional \$1.1 million.

Digitization and imaging are valuable because once a record is digitized and imaged it is available more quickly and can be issued from any Rhode Island municipality. Currently, the Office of Vital Records performs more than three times as many electronic transactions as in-person transactions. Digitization and imaging greatly reduces the labor intensity of producing a record and would allow the Vital Records staff and municipalities to serve customers more efficiently. Other states have already completely digitized and imaged their vital records collections, including Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Lack of electronic access is one of the impediments to customer service identified by the surveyed cities and towns. Twenty-three municipalities (of 32 responding) reported turning customers away due to not having access to the record electronically, and four municipalities specifically mentioned that it is the area that they would like improved. Additionally, full digitization and imaging would allow Vital Records to archive all their paper records entirely and exclusively use electronic records. Digital records also serve as an important duplicate in the event the original paper records become lost or damaged.

## Findings and Recommendations - Record Retention & Digitalization

The state should assess its options in restricting amendments of public records. Amending records in the custody of the state archives is time consuming, labor intensive, and likely outside the standard practice many other states employ. RIDOH should consider exploring how it can curtail this practice through policy, regulation, or a legislative amendment.

RIDOH should conduct a cost–benefit analysis to guide the completion of the digitization and imaging processes. While the cost of this project is significant, Vital Records estimates that it can be implemented over more than one year. Digitizing the records and implementing an imaging system could substantially increase Vital Records capacity and output, which would offset some, but likely not all, of the cost of this investment. Additionally, it would eliminate the risk of records being lost to human error, natural disasters, or other force majeure events.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Compilation of All Findings and Recommendations
- Appendix B – Vital Records Organizational Chart
- Appendix C – Vital Record Transaction Volume by Office
- Appendix D – State by State Vital Records Website Review
- Appendix E – RIDOH Vital Records Website Screenshot
- Appendix F – RIDOH Vital Records Website Review
- Appendix G – Vital Records In-Person Customer Service Process Map

# Appendix A

## Findings and Recommendations

## Findings and Recommendations – Transactions Channels

At every available opportunity, customers should be directed to the most efficient and/or convenient transaction channel. In CY 2023, approximately half of the services provided by State Vital Records related to certified copies of birth, death, and marriage certificates. While Vital Records should serve every customer without hesitation, every reasonable effort should be made to communicate that most transactions can be performed at local municipal offices and/or online. The Office of Vital Records should primarily focus on amendments and complex services that municipalities are not authorized to handle.

The ability to order records online should be more clearly communicated, by both the state and municipalities. Currently, over 50 percent of municipalities do not offer and/or indicate the existence of an online option to order vital records. Meanwhile, those that do use three different ordering systems (VitalChek, Permittum, eGov order form), each with its own processing fees. This results in inconsistent fees for Rhode Islanders for the same transaction type, which for many records could be obtained from any of the systems. At a minimum, municipalities need to state that an online option is available either at the local or state level and should provide a link or mention the VitalChek option through the state.

Vital Records should deploy an online appointment scheduling tool. Some states currently offer an online appointment scheduling tool on their Vital Records websites. For instance, Hawaii uses a scheduling tool developed with Microsoft Forms, which appears sleek and integrates with Outlook, both of which are software that Rhode Island state government agencies already possess.

## Findings and Recommendations – Public Communication

RIDOH should conduct regular reviews of the Vital Records website. A regular review of the website should include analyzing web traffic and engagement metrics, auditing content for accuracy and relevance, and conducting usability testing with real users to identify navigational challenges. Additionally, a technical review should be carried out to address issues like broken links, slow loading pages, and optimize search engine visibility. To ensure

customers are provided the necessary information to conduct their transactions through the most efficient and/or convenient channel available, Vital Records should state clearly on its website categories of records that can be ordered through municipalities and list the addresses and phone numbers of each municipal clerk's office.

RIDOH should routinely check websites that share information about Vital Records to ensure they are accurate and up to date. This involves making sure these websites correctly describe what Vital Records does and where it is located. If any incorrect or outdated information is found, RIDOH should ask the webmasters to make the necessary corrections or updates. For example, RIDOH should ensure that websites of municipalities, search engine results like Google, and major sites like the CDC reflect correct details. This helps keep all publicly available information about Vital Records consistent and reliable, supporting the credibility of their own website.

Vital Records' request forms should be standardized and unified across the State and municipalities. As of April 2024, nearly half of municipalities listed the incorrect State Vital Records address on their website, either in forms, brochures, or on the site itself. To regulate the customer service and comply with the laws, rules, and regulations, the State Vital Records should insist municipalities use up-to-date forms or link forms directly in the Vital Records repository in RIVERS.

Vital Records should explore the implementation of an automated phone system with pre-recorded prompts and call forwarding. Such a system would enable customers to self-navigate 24/7 to critical information such as operating hours, appointment scheduling, and online ordering options. During high traffic periods, the system could automatically reroute calls to available cross-trained staff or managers if needed. The implementation of an updated RIDOH information phone line can assist with phone communications but may require additional investment or feedback from Vital Records in order to offer the aforementioned services. Such a setup would streamline communications, decrease missed calls, and efficiently guide customers to appropriate services or local municipalities, improving overall service delivery.

## Findings and Recommendations - Payment and Pricing Analysis

Vital Records should provide clear and consistent information regarding payment methods for in-person transactions. Currently, there are disparities between forms, signs, verbal communication, and what is accepted at the in-person location. This leads to confusion for customers and can result in them foregoing their preferred method of payment when it is actually an option. In-person forms, signage, and verbal communication should provide the same information – which should also be consistent with the established policies.

RIDOH should explore the possibility of proposing amendments to the Vital Records fee structure to more closely reflect internal operational costs. [RIGL § 23-3-25](#) establishes the base fees for copies of records, which are standardized across all transaction channels (online, mail, in-person). However, additional processing fees exist for mail-in and online orders, which are more efficient for Vital Records than in-person orders. By amending cost structure by transaction channel, fees can be made to more closely align with the costs of the processes. This can encourage customers to use channels that are more cost-effective and efficient for the state and municipalities.

An inventory of all payment processing contracts should be conducted by OLIS. OMB's request for the RIDOH Vital Records payment processing contract and service level agreement demonstrated issues in current documentation, as neither RIDOH nor OLIS could locate a copy. Instead, the vendor had to provide a copy.

Rhode Island State Government should establish a uniform experience for customer payments across all state agencies and units. Currently, the process varies significantly from agency to agency and even between different units in an agency. Customers must deal with a variety of fees and a patchwork of forms of acceptable payment. Offering uniform payment methods can improve the ease of payment and increase customer satisfaction.

## Findings and Recommendations – Vital Records Office Operations

Vital Records should work to optimize efficiency in its anticipated customer service center. Vital Records staff currently navigate multiple steps to process transactions, traveling to

several areas within the office. As the new customer service center is implemented, Vital Records will benefit from external assistance to streamline operational processes and maximize efficiency. The OMB's Performance Management Unit can assist Vital Records with process improvement evaluations and planning, after the installation of the customer service center furniture.

## Findings and Recommendations - Municipal Vital Records Operations & Processes

Vital Records should leverage its supervisory powers to reduce inconsistencies in municipal processes related to vital records. It was found through direct communication with Rhode Island cities and towns more than two thirds of municipalities exhibited at least one inconsistency in the information between their websites and what was conveyed through phone inquiry and the municipal survey. Basic questions posed about RIVERS and other documents at the annual online training session demonstrated the need for more regular training sessions and/or additional reference materials to address important questions. Additionally, RIDOH should perform an annual review of municipal websites to ensure the accuracy of the information and forms.

A consistent cost per transaction channel should be established across all municipalities. Under the current patchwork system, the full cost (including processing fees) to obtain the same certificate varies by municipality, although many of those records are retrievable at any location.

Vital Records should explore other delivery options for security paper. The current delivery system, which involves Vital Records staff using their personal vehicles to transport boxes of security paper to municipalities each quarter, introduces unnecessary risk and may be placing undue burdens on employees.

## Findings and Recommendations - Record Retention & Digitalization

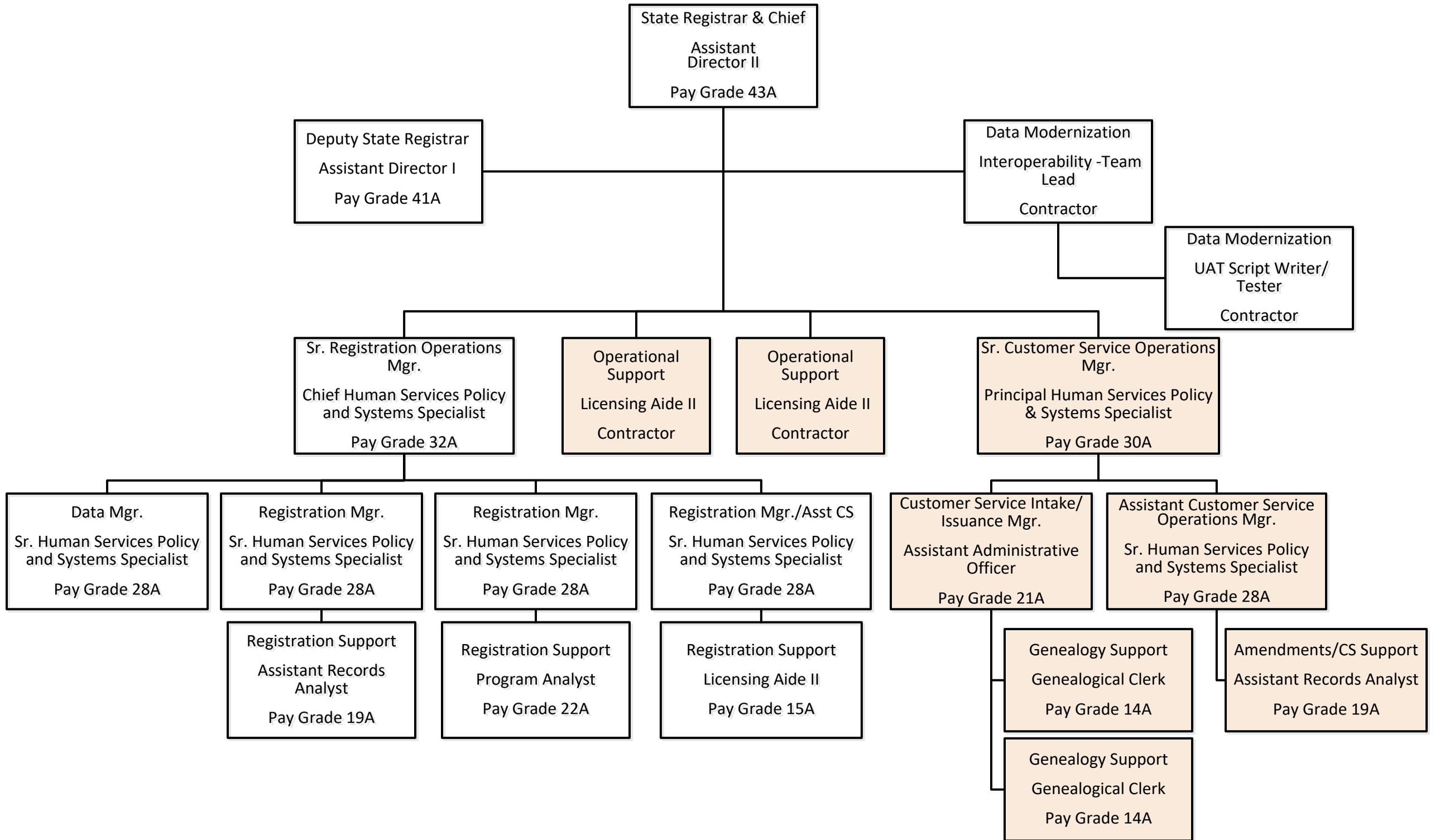
The state should assess its options in restricting amendments of public records. Amending

records in the custody of the state archives is time consuming, labor intensive, and likely outside the standard practice many other states employ. RIDOH should consider exploring how it can curtail this practice through policy, regulation, or a legislative amendment.

RIDOH should conduct a cost–benefit analysis to guide the completion of the digitization and imaging processes. While the cost of this project is significant, Vital Records estimates that it can be implemented over more than one year. Digitizing the records and implementing an imaging system could substantially increase Vital Records capacity and output, which would offset some, but likely not all, of the cost of this investment. Additionally, it would eliminate the risk of records being lost to human error, natural disasters, or other force majeure events.

# Appendix B – Vital Records Organizational Chart

**Rhode Island Department of Health Center for Vital Records Organization Chart - March 2024**



# Appendix C – Vital Record Transaction Volume by Office



# Appendix D – State by State Vital Records Website Review

State	Placing Order				Easy Navigation							Fees (\$)		
	Clear Order Instructions	Online Ordering Option (VitalChek)	Virtual Assistant or Online Chat?	Online Appt. Scheduling	Forms Easily Found	Fees Clearly Listed	Payment Methods Listed	Office Location, Hours, Phone # Listed	Contents Up-to-Date	Ease of Site Navigation	Total Score (out of 50)	VitalChek	By Mail (First Copy)	In Person (First Copy)
California	5	5	3	0	5	5	5	4	5	4	41	\$44.95	\$29.00	N/A
Colorado	5	5	3	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	46	\$32.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
Connecticut	5	5	0	0	5	5	3	5	5	5	38	\$42.95	\$30.00	\$30.00
Delaware	5	5	3	0	5	4	5	5	5	4	41	\$37.95	\$25.00	\$25.00
Hawaii	5	5	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	44	N/A	\$16.50	\$16.50
Illinois	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	40	\$30.00	\$15.00	N/A
Indiana	5	5	3	0	5	5	4	5	5	5	42	\$33.95	\$10.00	N/A
Maine	4	5	0	0	3	5	5	5	4	3	34	\$30.00	\$15.00	N/A
Maryland	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	2	5	5	44	\$21.75	\$10.00	\$10.00
Massachusetts	5	5	0	0	2	5	5	5	5	5	37	\$54.00	\$32.00	\$20.00
Michigan	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	48	\$48.00	\$34.00	\$34.00
Nebraska	4	5	0	0	4	5	5	3	5	3	34	N/A	\$17.00	\$17.00
New Hampshire	5	0	0	0	5	5	3	5	5	4	32	\$25.50	\$15.00	\$15.00
New Jersey	5	5	0	0	4	4	4	5	3	2	32	\$37.95	\$25.00	\$25.00
New York	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	2	5	2	34	\$45.00	\$30.00	N/A
North Carolina	5	5	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	45	\$37.95	\$30.00	\$39.00
Pennsylvania	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	40	N/A	\$20.00	\$20.00
Tennessee	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	4	5	5	39	\$26.75	\$15.00	\$15.00
Vermont	5	5	0	0	4	5	5	4	5	4	37	N/A	\$10.00	N/A
Virginia	5	5	5	0	5	5	2	5	5	4	41	\$32.75	\$12.00	\$12.00
Wisconsin	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	40	\$30.00	\$20.00	N/A
State Average	4.7	4.8	1.1	1.1	4.5	4.8	4.5	4.5	4.7	4.1	38.9	\$36.47	\$20.70	\$21.37
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>\$45.00</b>	<b>\$25.00</b>	<b>\$22.00</b>

In the chart, the responses are quantified on a scale from 0 to 5. A score of 5 represents 'Strongly Agree', 4 stands for 'Agree', 3 is noted as 'OK', 2 indicates 'Disagree', and 1 signifies 'Strongly Disagree'. The lowest score of 0 is assigned to 'No service or not provided on the website', indicating the absence or non-provision of services as described.

# Appendix E – RIDOH Vital Records Website Screenshot



State of Rhode Island

# Department of Health



A to Z

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[Food, Water & Environment](#)

[Birth, Death & Marriage Records](#)

[Laboratory Testing](#)

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## Birth, Death & Marriage Records

The Center of Vital Records has moved to 6 Harrington Rd. Cranston.

### Vital Records

#### ▼ Contact & Hours

**11** Vital Records  
Simpson Hall, 6 Harrington Rd Cranston, RI 02920  
7:30 AM - 3:30 PM,  
Weekdays

If you incurred funeral expenses for an individual who died from COVID-19 in the United States – including the U.S. Territories and the District of Columbia – after January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, you could be eligible for COVID-19 Funeral Assistance from FEMA.

**COVID-19 Funeral Assistance**  
**Find more information to request reimbursement**

### RIVERS Training Materials and Resources

#### Funeral Directors

- [Death Module Training Guide](#)
- [Fetal Death Module Training Guide](#)

#### Healthcare Facility Users

- [Birth Certifier User Guide](#)
- [Birth Facility User Guide](#)

# Appendix F – RIDOH Vital Records Website Review

## **RIDOH Vital Records Website Review**

The Performance Management Unit conducted a review of 25 state vital records websites and identified several features critical to the success of such a site, which can be leveraged to improve Rhode Island's site. Seven characteristics stood out as being required for a successful Vital Records website:

- 1. Home Page Layout** – The home page should be visually appealing, welcoming, and provide easy reference for the public to access applicable information. Maryland's Vital Records home page is designed with tiles and a navigation menu that both highlight applicable information for the public and provides a pleasing visual foundation.
- 2. Easily Navigable** – The website provides a clear layout that is easily navigable for the general public. Maryland's site also offers additional layers of tiles to help the public navigate the site to reach the exact information required.
- 3. Mobile Friendliness** – The website is easily viewable and navigable on a mobile platform or tablet, in addition to the desktop format. Tennessee's design provides a sleek, friendly view on mobile devices that highlights the most important information on the first page. Basic required information is available without scrolling, while a search bar can also be used to help with site navigation.
- 4. Accessibility & Applicability to a Wide Audience** – The website provides translation and accessibility services for all webpages. Simplistic explanations of processes, frequently asked questions (FAQs) are answered, and other features allow for all constituents to access the information. Indiana's website provides a plethora of accessibility options and several language options.
- 5. Updated & Accurate Information** – The website must contain content that is accurate and timely, and this information must be shared with partner organizations. Virginia's home page provides regularly updated standard processing times, and timely information on COVID-19 assistance and REAL ID.
- 6. Connections to Local Branches** – The website contains information on all locations that process Vital Records requests, including the names of the locations, addresses, hours, services offered, contact information, and possible directions. Virginia's Vital Records provides a full list of locations, the ability to search for nearest location based on current address, and directions to the location selected.

- 7. Clear Ordering Process & Fee Structure** – The website lists the channels for transactions, fee structure, payment methods, and required documents clearly on the website. Massachusetts' Vital Records provide clear ordering instructions based on the channel of the transaction. Drop downs for each method detail order instructions and a separate area on the site lists required documents and fees.

In addition to the seven required elements, additional enhanced features were identified from other state websites that could be adopted to great effect for Rhode Island's website.

Additional Enhanced Website Features:

- Online Scheduling System
- Transparent Processing Times
- Virtual Assistant

The current iteration of Rhode Island's Vital Records site can be improved, but some components site should be positively recognized in its current form. Over half of site visitors access the website through a mobile platform and the existing format provides a clean layout for that format. Additionally, the site offers translation services through Google Translate, which can translate all information on the site itself. However, there are many opportunities for improvement in structure, information contained on the site, and additional features.

The Center of Vital Records and their communications team have recognized the need to update the website and have initiated the process required to make changes. As part of the prospective revamp of the site, the developers plan to receive key stakeholder feedback and take the above features into consideration.

# Appendix G – Vital Records In-Person Customer Service Process Map

# State of Rhode Island Vital Records Process Map

Preliminary Draft for Review Only - Not a public record pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-2-2(a)(4)(K)  
 Pre-Decisional/For Deliberative Discussion Only – Not a public record pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-2-2(a)(4)(E)

