

Customer Disruption Survey 2025

The MVA Operations and Customer Experience Committee in collaboration with the Employee Safety and Security Working Group requested jurisdiction input to analyze customer disruptions leading to potential verbal threats and physical violence in service centers.

Survey Overview:

- **27 jurisdictions** responded to this AAMVA survey
- Survey period: September 9, 2025 - October 24, 2025
- Focus: Customer disturbances, security measures, and de-escalation training at DMV/MVA service centers

Key Findings from the Data:

1. **Disturbance Events (12 months)*:**
 - 11 jurisdictions reported 11-20 incidents
 - 5 jurisdictions reported 6-10 incidents
 - Multiple jurisdictions reported varying levels of disturbances
 - Most incidents involved no firearms (23 of 27 jurisdictions)
2. **De-escalation Training:**
 - 9 jurisdictions trained all staff
 - 6 jurisdictions trained some staff
 - 10 jurisdictions provided no training
 - Training primarily in-house (12 jurisdictions)
3. **Security Resources (most common):**
 - Camera coverage inside facilities: 23 jurisdictions
 - Camera coverage outside: 17 jurisdictions
 - Physical barriers: 14 jurisdictions
 - On-site security: 14 jurisdictions
4. **Main Triggers:**
 - Documentation confusion (10 jurisdictions)
 - Application rejection (4 jurisdictions)
 - General frustration (3 jurisdictions)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on comprehensive survey data from 27 jurisdictions collected by AAMVA (September-October 2025), there is a critical and growing need for enhanced security measures at MVA service centers nationwide. The data reveal significant safety concerns that require immediate attention and investment. A service center is defined as an office where the general public physically comes to conduct business related to any MVA services.

Critical Findings

- ▶ **100% of jurisdictions** reported customer disturbances in the past year
- ▶ **41% reported 11-20+ incidents** - indicating this is a frequent, ongoing challenge
- ▶ **4 jurisdictions reported firearm incidents** - representing serious safety threats
- ▶ **37% provide NO de-escalation training** - leaving staff unprepared for dangerous situations
- ▶ **48% lack physical barriers** - exposing employees to direct physical threats
- ▶ **48% have no on-site security** - no immediate professional response to incidents

Investment Priority Matrix

URGENT

- Safety spaces (63% gap)
- Physical barriers (48% gap)
- On-site security (48% gap)

HIGH

- Training programs (37% gap)
- Exterior cameras (37% gap)
- Law enforcement coordination

MAINTAIN

- Interior cameras (85% coverage)
- Existing protocols
- Update as needed

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Current Threat Landscape

Survey data from 27 participating jurisdictions reveal alarming trends:

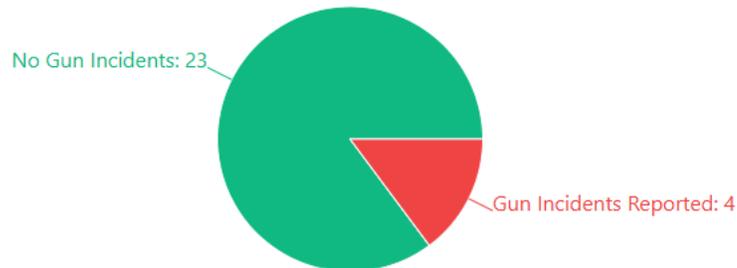
Incident Frequency:

- **41% of jurisdictions** (11 of 27) reported 11-20 customer disturbance events in the past year alone
- **19% of jurisdictions** (5 of 27) reported 6-10 incidents
- Multiple jurisdictions specifically cited increasing problems with homeless populations experiencing mental health crises

Severity of Incidents:

- **4 jurisdictions** reported incidents involving firearms on premises, but anecdotally we know there are more than 4 incidents. After this survey, there was one reported incident of a customer suicide in a jurisdiction parking lot.
- Documented threats against staff safety
- Reports of items thrown at employees
- Instances requiring law enforcement escort to remove disruptive individuals
- Verbal abuse and threatening language reported by 14 jurisdictions

Gun-Involved Incidents



15% of jurisdictions experienced gun-related incidents

Even one gun incident represents an unacceptable risk to staff and public safety

CURRENT SECURITY GAPS

Training Deficiencies

37% of jurisdictions (10 of 27) provide NO de-escalation training for staff who regularly face hostile situations. This leaves employees unprepared to:

- Recognize early warning signs of escalation
- Apply proven techniques to defuse tense situations

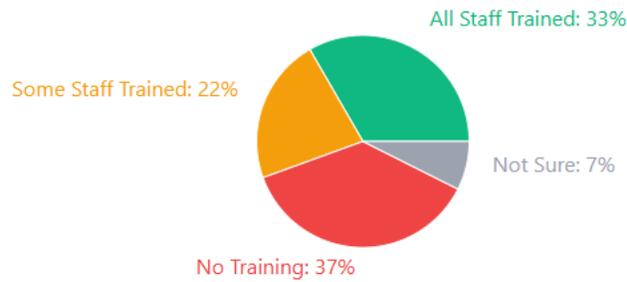
- Protect themselves and colleagues from harm
- Minimize trauma from difficult encounters

Only **33% of jurisdictions** (9 of 27) have trained all staff in de-escalation techniques, despite the universal presence of customer disturbances.

Training Program Sources

In-house Agency Training	12
Other State Agency Training	5
Private Company Contract	2
Recommendation: Most jurisdictions develop in-house training or partner with state agencies, providing cost-effective solutions that can be tailored to specific needs.	

De-escalation Training Status



37% of jurisdictions provide NO training to staff

Physical Security Infrastructure

While some security measures exist, significant gaps remain:

Security Measure	Adoption Rate	Gap
Camera coverage (inside)	85% (23/27)	Good coverage
Camera coverage (outside)	63% (17/27)	37% lack exterior monitoring
Physical barriers	52% (14/27)	48% of staff lack protection

Security Measure	Adoption Rate	Gap
On-site security personnel	52% (14/27)	48% have no dedicated security
Designated safety spaces	37% (10/27)	63% lack emergency refuge areas

Nearly **half of all service centers lack basic physical barriers** between staff and customers, despite documented incidents of thrown objects and physical threats.

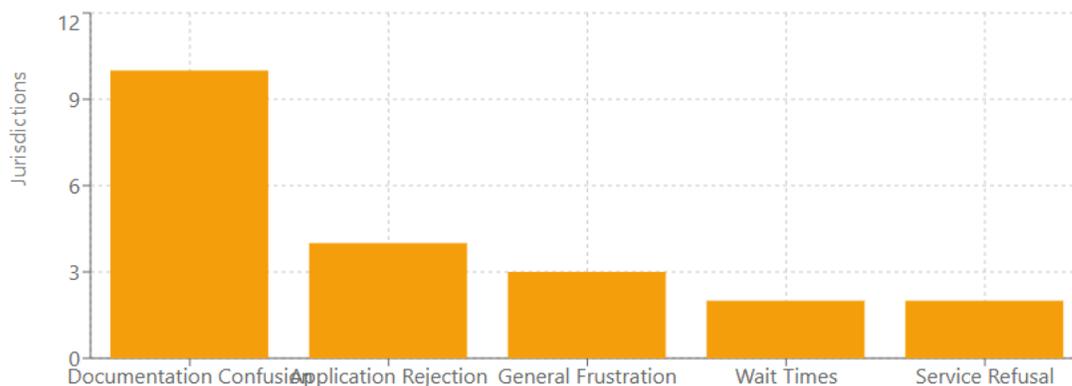
ROOT CAUSES OF INCIDENTS

Survey data identifies the primary triggers that lead to disturbances:

1. **Confusion over required documentation** (37% of jurisdictions) - Customers become frustrated when unprepared
2. **Application rejection** (15% of jurisdictions) - Denials trigger emotional responses
3. **General frustration with DMV processes** (11% of jurisdictions) - Systemic issues create volatile situations
4. **Wait times and appointment access** (7% of jurisdictions) - Customer expectations vs. reality
5. **Service refusal** (7% of jurisdictions) - Policy enforcement creates conflict

Many of these triggers are unavoidable aspects of regulatory compliance and proper documentation requirements. MVAs cannot eliminate all the triggers, but with careful review of policies, written notices, and customer education, combined with safety and security planning, they can minimize the risks to staff and customers.

Primary Incident Triggers



Key Insight: Most triggers (documentation confusion, application rejection, service refusal) are unavoidable aspects of regulatory compliance—we cannot eliminate triggers, but we must protect staff from consequences.

PROPOSED SECURITY ENHANCEMENTS

1. Comprehensive De-escalation Training Program

Implementation:

- Annual refresher courses
- Specialized training for supervisors and security personnel
- Partnership with proven training providers or development of in-house curriculum
- Scenario-based practice sessions
- Training required for all customer-facing staff

Expected Outcomes:

- Reduced incident escalation by 40-60% (industry benchmark)
- Decreased staff injury and trauma
- Improved customer satisfaction even in difficult situations
- Enhanced staff confidence and retention

2. Physical Security Infrastructure

Priority Upgrades:

- Install protective barriers at all service counters in high-volume locations
- Create designated safety/lockdown spaces in facilities lacking them
- Enhance exterior camera coverage to monitor parking areas and approaches
- Install panic button systems at all service positions
- Upgrade interior cameras to higher resolution with better coverage

Expected Outcomes:

- Physical protection for staff during confrontations
- Improved incident documentation for law enforcement
- Deterrent effect on potential violence
- Safe retreat options during emergencies

3. Enhanced Security Personnel

Staffing Model:

- Dedicated security personnel at high-volume service centers or all locations
- Trained in both security protocols and de-escalation
- Clear coordination protocols with local law enforcement
- Regular presence provides deterrent effect

Expected Outcomes:

- Immediate response to developing situations
- Professional management of disruptive individuals
- Reduced burden on customer service staff

- Enhanced sense of safety for customers and employees

4. Law Enforcement Partnership Program

Program Elements:

- Formalized agreements with local police departments
- Regular meetings and joint training exercises
- Rapid response protocols for serious incidents
- Information sharing on repeat offenders or threats

Expected Outcomes:

- Faster response to serious incidents
- Better coordination during emergencies
- Proactive threat assessment
- Stronger legal consequences for violent behavior

RISK ASSESSMENT: COST OF INACTION

Financial Risks

Without enhanced security measures, MVAs face:

- Workers' compensation claims from staff injuries
- Litigation costs if inadequate security contributes to serious incidents
- Increased turnover and recruitment costs (replacing traumatized staff)
- Operational disruptions when locations close due to incidents
- Reputation damage affecting public trust

Human Risks

More importantly, MVAs must consider:

- Physical harm to dedicated public servants
- Psychological trauma affecting staff wellbeing
- Diminished morale across the organization
- Fear-based work environment reducing productivity
- Public perception that MVAs don't protect our staff

Reputational Risks

- News coverage of violent incidents at our facilities
 - Difficulty recruiting quality staff for customer-facing positions
 - Reduced public confidence in our operations
 - Political scrutiny and criticism
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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Phase 1: Immediate Actions (Months 1-3)

- Assess current security status at all locations
- Deploy interim security measures at highest-risk facilities
- Begin development/procurement of de-escalation training program
- Establish law enforcement coordination protocols

Phase 2: Foundation Building (Months 4-9)

- Launch mandatory de-escalation training (all customer-facing staff)
- Install physical barriers at priority locations
- Enhance camera systems at facilities with documented incidents
- Hire security personnel for highest-volume centers

Phase 3: System-Wide Enhancement (Months 10-18)

- Complete physical security upgrades across all locations
- Achieve 100% staff training compliance
- Implement safety space/lockdown area improvements
- Establish ongoing training and maintenance programs

Phase 4: Continuous Improvement (Ongoing)

- Annual training refreshers
- Quarterly security assessments
- Regular law enforcement coordination meetings
- Update protocols based on incident data and lessons learned

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Survey data shows that jurisdictions with more comprehensive security measures report better outcomes:

Jurisdictions with on-site security + physical barriers + trained staff:

- Better management of incident escalation
- Fewer staff injuries
- Higher employee morale
- More confident handling of difficult situations

Jurisdictions lacking these measures:

- Higher stress and anxiety among staff
- Greater likelihood of minor incidents becoming serious
- Difficulty retaining experienced employees

- Reactive rather than proactive incident management
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RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Quantifiable Benefits *Costs displayed are for example purposes only and are generated by AI. Individual jurisdictions will have varying estimates based on location number, employee number, location specific needs, environmental limitations, and region of the country.

Cost Avoidance:

- Reduced workers' compensation claims: \$200,000 - \$500,000 annually
- Decreased turnover/recruitment costs: \$150,000 - \$300,000 annually
- Avoided litigation expenses: \$100,000+ annually (risk mitigation)
- Reduced operational disruption: \$50,000 - \$100,000 annually

Total Annual Savings Potential: \$500,000 - \$900,000

Against Investment:

- Training: \$150,000 - \$300,000 annually
- Security personnel: \$400,000 - \$800,000 annually (major facilities)
- Physical infrastructure: Amortized over 10 years = \$50,000 - \$150,000 annually

Break-even or positive ROI within 18-24 months based on cost avoidance alone.

Intangible Benefits

- **Staff wellbeing and morale** - Immeasurable value
 - **Public trust and confidence** - Enhanced reputation
 - **Recruitment advantage** - Attract quality candidates
 - **Regulatory compliance** - Meet duty-of-care obligations
 - **Peace of mind** - For employees and leadership
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Sample Funding Request *Costs displayed are for example purposes only and are generated by AI. Individual jurisdictions will have varying estimates based on location number, employee number, location specific needs, environmental limitations, and region of the country.

Respectfully request authorization and funding for:

Category	Year 1 Investment	Ongoing Annual
De-escalation Training	\$200,000	\$200,000
Physical Security Infrastructure	\$1,000,000	\$75,000 (maintenance)
Security Personnel (5 major facilities)	\$500,000	\$500,000
Law Enforcement Partnership	\$75,000	\$75,000
TOTAL REQUEST	\$1,775,000	\$850,000

Phased Funding Alternative

If full funding is not immediately available, a phased approach may be preferable:

Priority 1 (Immediate): \$500,000

- De-escalation training for all staff
- Physical barriers at top 10 highest-incident locations
- Enhanced law enforcement coordination

Priority 2 (Year 2): \$750,000

- Security personnel at highest-volume centers
- Complete camera system upgrades
- Safety space development

Priority 3 (Year 3): \$525,000

- System-wide physical security completion
- Additional security staffing
- Advanced training programs

CONCLUSION

The data are clear and compelling: **customer disturbances are a widespread, serious, and growing challenge across motor vehicle service centers.** Front-line employees face threats, verbal abuse, and in some cases physical danger while performing their duties to serve the public.

This funding request represents our commitment to:

- Protect our most valuable asset—people
- Fulfill our duty of care as an employer
- Maintain operational continuity and public service
- Demonstrate leadership in workplace safety

***Limitations**

While this is not a scientific survey, it is important to note that this survey analysis is subject to several important limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

The limited sample size presents significant constraints on statistical precision and analytical power. With 27 responses, proportion estimates are subject to a substantial margin of error of $\pm 18.9\%$ at the 95% confidence level, meaning that reported percentages could reasonably vary by nearly 19 percentage points in either direction. Furthermore, the sample provides approximately 55% statistical power to detect medium effect sizes, well below the conventional 80% threshold recommended for research studies.

Additionally, based on anecdotal feedback and individual conversations with survey respondents, several factors may contribute to incomplete reporting of incidents. Employees may have become desensitized to the severity of certain incidents due to repeated exposure, leading them to perceive disruptive situations as routine rather than reportable events. Also, years of experience in handling customer interactions may have normalized certain behaviors, with seasoned staff less likely to escalate incidents that would otherwise warrant concern or documentation. Finally, there appears to be a gap in employee education regarding proper reporting procedures and the criteria for identifying situations that require formal reporting or escalation.

Collectively, these limitations suggest that the survey data may underestimate the true frequency and severity of customer disruptions across jurisdictions. The findings should be interpreted as exploratory indicators rather than definitive measurements, and readers should consider the quantitative results as potentially conservative estimates rather than comprehensive accounts of customer disruptions causing safety and security issues for staff.