

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-4007 and 2.2-4031 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Administrative Process Act; petitions for rulemaking; publication by Registrar.

[H 725]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That §§ 2.2-4007 and 2.2-4031 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 2.2-4007. Notice of intended regulatory action; public participation; informational proceedings; effect of noncompliance.

A. Any person may petition an agency to request the agency to develop a new regulation or amend an existing regulation. *The petition shall state (i) the substance and purpose of the rulemaking that is requested, including reference to any applicable Virginia Administrative Code sections, and (ii) reference to the legal authority of the agency to take the action requested. Within fourteen days of receiving a petition, the agency shall send a notice identifying the petitioner, the nature of the petitioner's request and the agency's plan for disposition of the petition to the Registrar for publication in the Virginia Register of Regulations in accordance with the provisions of subsection B of § 2.2-4031. On the date of publication in the Virginia Register of Regulations, the agency shall commence a twenty-one-day period for acceptance of written public comment on the petition. The agency shall issue a written decision to grant or deny the petitioner's request within ninety days following the close of the comment period. However, if the rulemaking authority is vested in an entity that has not met within that ninety day period, the entity shall issue a written decision no later than fourteen days after it next meets. The written decision issued by the agency shall include a statement of its reasons and shall be submitted to the Registrar for publication in the Virginia Register of Regulations. The agency receiving the petition shall consider and respond to the petition within 180 days.* Agency decisions to initiate or not initiate rulemaking in response to petitions shall not be subject to judicial review.

B. In the case of all regulations, except those regulations exempted by §§ 2.2-4002, 2.2-4006 or § 2.2-4011, an agency shall provide the Registrar of Regulations with a Notice of Intended Regulatory Action that describes the subject matter and intent of the planned regulation. At least thirty days shall be provided for public comment after publication of the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action. An agency shall not file proposed regulations with the Registrar until the public comment period on the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action has closed.

C. Agencies shall state in the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action whether they plan to hold a public hearing on the proposed regulation after it is published. Agencies shall hold such public hearings if required by basic law. If the agency states an intent to hold a public hearing on the proposed regulation in the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action, then it shall hold the public hearing. If the agency states in its Notice of Intended Regulatory Action that it does not plan to hold a hearing on the proposed regulation, then no public hearing is required unless, prior to completion of the comment period specified in the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (i) the Governor directs the agency to hold a public hearing or (ii) the agency receives requests for a public hearing from at least twenty-five persons.

D. Public participation guidelines for soliciting the input of interested parties in the formation and development of its regulations shall be developed, adopted and utilized by each agency pursuant to the provisions of this chapter. The guidelines shall set out any methods for the identification and notification of interested parties, and any specific means of seeking input from interested persons or groups that the agency intends to use in addition to the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action. The guidelines shall set out a general policy for the use of standing or ad hoc advisory panels and consultation with groups and individuals registering interest in working with the agency. Such policy shall address the circumstances in which the agency considers the panels or consultation appropriate and intends to make use of the panels or consultation.

E. In formulating any regulation, including but not limited to those in public assistance programs, the agency pursuant to its public participation guidelines shall afford interested persons an opportunity to submit data, views, and arguments, either orally or in writing, to the agency or its specially designated subordinate. However, the agency may begin drafting the proposed regulation prior to or during any opportunities it provides to the public to submit comments.

F. In the case of all regulations, except those regulations exempted by §§ 2.2-4002, 2.2-4006, or § 2.2-4011, the proposed regulation and general notice of opportunity for oral or written submittals as to

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that regulation shall be published in the Virginia Register of Regulations in accordance with the provisions of subsection B of § 2.2-4031. In addition, the agency may, in its discretion, (i) publish the notice in any newspaper and (ii) publicize the notice through press releases and such other media as will best serve the purpose and subject involved. The Register and any newspaper publication shall be made at least sixty days in advance of the last date prescribed in the notice for such submittals. All notices, written submittals, and transcripts, summaries or notations of oral presentations, as well as any agency action thereon, shall be matters of public record in the custody of the agency.

G. Before delivering any proposed regulation under consideration to the Registrar as required in subsection H, the agency shall deliver a copy of that regulation to the Department of Planning and Budget. In addition to determining the public benefit, the Department of Planning and Budget in coordination with the agency, shall, within forty-five days, prepare an economic impact analysis of the proposed regulation. The economic impact analysis shall include, but need not be limited to, the projected number of businesses or other entities to whom the regulation would apply; the identity of any localities and types of businesses or other entities particularly affected by the regulation; the projected number of persons and employment positions to be affected; the impact of the regulation on the use and value of private property; and the projected costs to affected businesses, localities or entities to implement or comply with the regulations, including the estimated fiscal impact on such localities and sources of potential funds to implement and comply with such regulation. Agencies shall provide the Department with such estimated fiscal impacts on localities and sources of potential funds. The Department may request the assistance of any other agency in preparing the analysis. The Department shall deliver a copy of the analysis to the agency drafting the regulation, which shall comment thereon as provided in subsection H, and a copy to the Registrar for publication with the proposed regulation. No regulation shall be promulgated for consideration pursuant to subsection H until the impact analysis has been received by the Registrar. For purposes of this section, the term "locality, business, or entity particularly affected" means any locality, business, or entity that bears any identified disproportionate material impact that would not be experienced by other localities, businesses, or entities. The analysis shall represent the Department's best estimate for the purposes of public review and comment on the proposed regulation. The accuracy of the estimate shall in no way affect the validity of the regulation, nor shall any failure to comply with or otherwise follow the procedures set forth in this subsection create any cause of action or provide standing for any person under Article 5 (§ 2.2-4025 et seq.) of this chapter or otherwise to challenge the actions of the Department hereunder or the action of the agency in adopting the proposed regulation.

H. Before promulgating any regulation under consideration, the agency shall deliver a copy of that regulation to the Registrar together with a summary of the regulation and a separate and concise statement of (i) the basis of the regulation, defined as the statutory authority for promulgating the regulation, including an identification of the section number and a brief statement relating the content of the statutory authority to the specific regulation proposed; (ii) the purpose of the regulation, defined as the rationale or justification for the new provisions of the regulation, from the standpoint of the public's health, safety or welfare; (iii) the substance of the regulation, defined as the identification and explanation of the key provisions of the regulation that make changes to the current status of the law; (iv) the issues of the regulation, defined as the primary advantages and disadvantages for the public, and as applicable for the agency or the state, of implementing the new regulatory provisions; and (v) the agency's response to the economic impact analysis submitted by the Department of Planning and Budget pursuant to subsection G. Any economic impact estimate included in the agency's response shall represent the agency's best estimate for the purposes of public review and comment, but the accuracy of the estimate shall in no way affect the validity of the regulation. Staff as designated by the Code Commission shall review proposed regulation submission packages to ensure the requirements of this subsection are met prior to publication of the proposed regulation in the Register. The summary; the statement of the basis, purpose, substance, and issues; the economic impact analysis; and the agency's response shall be published in the Virginia Register of Regulations, together with the notice of opportunity for oral or written submittals on the proposed regulation.

I. When an agency formulating regulations in public assistance programs cannot comply with the public comment requirements of subsection F due to time limitations imposed by state or federal laws or regulations for the adoption of such regulation, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources may shorten the time requirements of subsection F. If, in the Secretary's sole discretion, such time limitations reasonably preclude any advance published notice, he may waive the requirements of subsection F. However, the agency shall, as soon as practicable after the adoption of the regulation in a manner consistent with the requirements of subsection F, publish notice of the promulgation of the regulation and afford an opportunity for public comment. The precise factual basis for the Secretary's determination shall be stated in the published notice.

J. If one or more changes with substantial impact are made to a proposed regulation from the time

that it is published as a proposed regulation to the time it is published as a final regulation, any person may petition the agency within thirty days from the publication of the final regulation to request an opportunity for oral and written submittals on the changes to the regulation. If the agency receives requests from at least twenty-five persons for an opportunity to submit oral and written comments on the changes to the regulation, the agency shall (i) suspend the regulatory process for thirty days to solicit additional public comment and (ii) file notice of the additional thirty-day public comment period with the Registrar of Regulations, unless the agency determines that the changes made are minor or inconsequential in their impact. The comment period, if any, shall begin on the date of publication of the notice in the Register. Agency denial of petitions for a comment period on changes to the regulation shall be subject to judicial review.

K. In no event shall the failure to comply with the requirements of subsection F of this section be deemed mere harmless error for the purposes of § 2.2-4027.

L. This section shall not apply to the issuance by the State Air Pollution Control Board of variances to its regulations.

§ 2.2-4031. Publication of Virginia Register of Regulations; exceptions; notice of meetings of executive branch agencies.

A. The Registrar shall publish every two weeks a Virginia Register of Regulations that shall include (i) proposed and final regulations; (ii) emergency regulations; (iii) executive orders; (iv) notices of all public meetings and public hearings of state agencies, legislative committees and study subcommittees; (v) *petitions for rulemaking made in accordance with subsection A of § 2.2-4007*; and ~~(v)~~ (vi) tax bulletins. The entire proposed regulation shall be published in the Register; however, if an existing regulation has been previously published in the Virginia Administrative Code, then only those sections of regulations to be amended need to be published in the Register. If the length of the regulation falls within the guidelines established by the Registrar for the publication of a summary in lieu of the full text of the regulation, then, after consultation with the promulgating agency, the Registrar may print only the summary of the regulation. In this event, the full text of the regulation shall be available for public inspection at the office of the Registrar and the promulgating agency.

If a proposed regulation is adopted as published or, in the sole discretion of the Registrar of Regulations, the only changes that have been made are those that can be clearly and concisely explained, the adopted regulation need not be published at length. Instead, the Register shall contain a notation that the proposed regulation has been adopted as published as a proposed regulation without change or stating the changes made. The proposed regulation shall be clearly identified with a citation to the issue and page numbers where published.

A copy of all reporting forms the promulgating agency anticipates will be incorporated into or be used in administering the regulation shall be printed with the proposed and final regulation in the Register.

B. Each regulation shall be prefaced with a summary explaining that regulation in plain and clear language. Summaries shall be prepared by the promulgating agency and approved by the Registrar prior to their publication in the Register. The notice required by § 2.2-4007 shall include (i) a statement of the date, time and place of the hearing at which the regulation is to be considered; (ii) a brief statement as to the regulation under consideration; (iii) reference to the legal authority of the agency to act; and (iv) the name, address and telephone number of an individual to contact for further information about that regulation. Agencies shall present their proposed regulations in a standardized format developed by the Virginia Code Commission in accordance with subdivision 1 of § 2.2-4104 of the Virginia Register Act (§ 2.2-4100 et seq.). Notwithstanding the exemptions allowed under §§ 2.2-4002, 2.2-4006 or § 2.2-4011, the proposed and final regulations of all agencies shall be published in the Register. However, proposed regulations of the Marine Resources Commission and regulations exempted by subject from the provisions of this chapter by subsection B of § 2.2-4006 shall be exempt from this section.

C. Notwithstanding the definition of "agency," notices for all meetings of state agencies required to be open pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (§ 2.2-3700 et seq.), except for legislative meetings held during regular and special sessions, shall be published in the Register. Each notice shall include (i) the date, time and place of the meeting; (ii) a brief general description of the nature of the meeting and the business to be conducted; and (iii) the name, address and telephone number of an individual who may be contacted for additional information about the meeting. Failure to publish in the Register the notice for such a meeting or any inadequacies in the information contained in the notice shall not affect the legality of actions taken at that meeting.