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HOUSE BILL NO. 1491

Offered January 20, 2006

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-705, 24.2-709, 24.2-710, and 24.2-712 of the Code of Virginia, relating to absentee voting procedures and the deadline for returning voted absentee ballots.

Patrons—Valentine, Amundson, Cline, Melvin, Oder and Scott, J.M.

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-705, 24.2-709, 24.2-710, 24.2-712 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-705. Emergency applications and absentee ballots for persons incapacitated or hospitalized.

Any person registered and otherwise qualified to vote who becomes incapacitated on or after the seventh day preceding an election may request at any time prior to 2:00 p.m. on the day preceding the election that an emergency absentee ballot application be delivered to him. A voter who becomes hospitalized on or after the fourteenth day preceding the election and who is unable, because of his condition, to request an absentee ballot earlier than the seventh day preceding the election may request at any time prior to 2:00 p.m. on the day before an election that an emergency absentee ballot be delivered to him in the hospital. For purposes of this section, "incapacitated" means hospitalized, ill and confined to his residence, bereaved by the death of a spouse, child, or parent, or otherwise incapacitated by an emergency which is found by the electoral board to justify providing an emergency ballot application; and "hospital" means a hospital as defined in § 32.1-123 and any comparable hospital in the District of Columbia or any state contiguous to Virginia.

On receipt of the request, the electoral board shall provide an emergency absentee ballot application to the incapacitated voter's designated representative who shall deliver the application to the voter. If the voter is hospitalized, the delivery shall be made to him at the hospital; and if the voter is otherwise incapacitated, the delivery shall be made to him at his current residence address as shown on the registration records. The representative shall be age eighteen or older and shall not be an elected official, a candidate for elected office, or the deputy, spouse, parent, or child of an elected official or candidate.

The application shall be on a form prescribed by the State Board and shall require the applicant (i) to state the cause of his incapacity, (ii) to state that he is unable to be present at the polls on election day, and that he was either incapacitated on or after the seventh day preceding the election or hospitalized on or after the fourteenth day preceding the election and unable to request the application earlier than the seventh day preceding the election, (iii) to designate a representative to receive, deliver and return the ballot, and (iv) to provide other information required by law for an absentee ballot application.

If the voter is hospitalized, a hospital administrative official or a licensed physician attending the applicant shall certify on the form to the hospitalization of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is ill and confined to his residence, a licensed physician or an accredited religious practitioner attending the applicant shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is bereaved, a licensed physician, an accredited religious practitioner or a funeral service licensee (as defined in § 54.1-2800) shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is otherwise incapacitated as determined by the electoral board, the secretary of the electoral board shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. The applicant shall sign the application and state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that to the best of his knowledge and belief the facts contained in the application are true and correct. His signature shall be witnessed by the designated representative who shall sign and return the completed application to the office of the general registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day preceding the election. For the purposes of this section, "accredited religious practitioner" means a person who has been trained in spiritual healing or the other healing arts and has been so accredited by a formal religious order.

On receipt of the completed application and a determination of the qualification of the applicant to vote, the general registrar or secretary of the electoral board shall provide, in accordance with the applicable provisions of this chapter, an absentee ballot to the designated representative for delivery to the incapacitated voter.

The incapacitated voter shall vote the absentee ballot as provided by law and mark it in the presence of the designated representative. The representative shall complete a statement, subject to felony

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59 penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that (i) he is the representative of the
60 incapacitated voter; (ii) he personally delivered the ballot to the voter who applied for it; (iii) in his
61 presence, the voter marked the ballot, the ballot was placed in the envelope provided, the envelope was
62 sealed, and the statement on its reverse side was signed by the incapacitated voter; and (iv) the ballot
63 was returned, under seal, to the electoral board at the registrar's office.

64 The ballot shall be counted only if the ballot is received by the electoral board ~~(i) prior to noon on~~
65 ~~the day of the election in any county, city, or town which does not have a central absentee voter~~
66 ~~election district or (ii) prior to the closing of the polls in any county, city, or town which has a central~~
67 ~~absentee voter precinct prior to the close of polls, and the electoral board shall deliver the ballot to the~~
68 ~~officers of election at each appropriate precinct pursuant to § 24.2-710.~~

69 § 24.2-709. Ballot to be returned in manner prescribed by law.

70 Any ballot returned to the office of the electoral board or general registrar in any manner except as
71 prescribed by law, shall be void. Absentee ballots shall be returned to the electoral board or general
72 registrar ~~in time to be delivered to the officers of election~~ before the closing of the polls. The board
73 member or registrar receiving the ballot shall mark on each envelope the date, time, and manner of
74 delivery. For all ballots returned by the general registrar to the electoral board, the board shall give to
75 the general registrar a receipt showing the time and date of the return.

76 § 24.2-710. Further duties of electoral board and general registrar; absentee voter applicant lists.

77 On receipt of an absentee ballot, the electoral board or general registrar shall mark the date of receipt
78 in the appropriate column opposite the name and address of the voter on the absentee voter applicant list
79 maintained in the general registrar's office. A board member or registrar shall deposit the return
80 envelope and the unopened ballot envelope in an appropriate container provided for the purpose, in
81 which they shall remain until the day of the election.

82 On the day before the election, the general registrar shall (i) make out in triplicate on a form
83 prescribed by the State Board the absentee voter applicant list containing the names of all persons who
84 applied for an absentee ballot through the third day before the election and (ii) by noon on the day
85 before the election, deliver two copies of the list to the electoral board. The general registrar shall make
86 out a supplementary list containing the names of all persons voting absentee in person pursuant to
87 §§ 24.2-705.1 and 24.2-705.2, or applying to vote absentee pursuant to § 24.2-705, for delivery by 5:00
88 p.m. on the day before the election. The supplementary list shall be deemed part of the absentee voter
89 applicant list and shall be prepared and delivered in accordance with the instructions of the State Board.
90 The general registrar shall maintain one copy of the list in his office for two years as a public record
91 open for inspection upon request during regular office hours.

92 On the day before the election, the electoral board shall deliver one copy of the list provided to it by
93 the general registrar to the chief officer of election for each precinct. The list shall be attested by the
94 secretary of the electoral board who shall be responsible for the delivery of the attested lists to the chief
95 officer of election for each precinct.

96 Absentee ballots shall be accepted only from voters whose names appear on the attested list.

97 Before the polls close on the day of the election, the electoral board shall deliver the absentee ballot
98 containers to, and obtain a receipt from, the officers of election at each appropriate precinct. *Any ballot*
99 *returned to the electoral board or general registrar prior to the closing of the polls, but after the ballot*
100 *container has been delivered, shall be delivered in an appropriate container to the officers of election at*
101 *each appropriate precinct.* The containers shall be sealed prior to delivery to the officers and shall
102 contain the sealed absentee ballots, the accompanying return envelopes, and a copy of the absentee voter
103 applicant list for each precinct.

104 If the county or city uses a central absentee voter precinct pursuant to § 24.2-712, the lists and
105 containers shall be delivered, as provided in this section, to the officers of election for the absentee
106 precinct.

107 Before noon on the day following the election, the general registrar shall deliver all applications for
108 absentee ballots for the election, under seal, to the clerk of the circuit court for the county or city. The
109 clerk shall retain the sealed applications with the counted ballots.

110 The secretary of the electoral board shall deliver all absentee ballots received after the election to the
111 clerk of the circuit court.

112 § 24.2-712. Central absentee voter precincts; counting ballots.

113 A. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the governing body of each county or city may
114 establish one or more central absentee voter precincts in the courthouse or other public buildings for the
115 purpose of receiving, counting, and recording absentee ballots cast in the county or city. The decision to
116 establish any absentee voter precinct shall be made by the governing body by ordinance; the ordinance
117 shall state for which elections the precinct shall be used. The decision to abolish any absentee voter
118 precinct shall be made by the governing body by ordinance. Immediate notification of either decision
119 shall be sent to the State Board and the electoral board.

120 B. Each central absentee voter precinct shall have at least three officers of election as provided for

121 other precincts. The number of officers shall be determined by the electoral board.

122 C. If any voter brings an unmarked ballot to the central absentee voter precinct on the day of the
123 election, he shall be allowed to vote it. If any voter brings an unmarked ballot to the electoral board on
124 or before the day of the election, he shall be allowed to vote it, and his ballot shall be delivered to the
125 absentee voter precinct ~~before the closing of the polls~~ pursuant to § 24.2-710.

126 The officers at the absentee voter precinct shall determine any appeal by any other voter whose name
127 appears on the absentee voter applicant list and who offers to vote in person. If the officers at the
128 absentee voter precinct produce records showing the receipt of his application and the certificate of
129 mailing for the ballot, they shall deny his appeal. If the officers cannot produce such records, the voter
130 shall be allowed to vote in person at the absentee voter precinct and have his vote counted with other
131 absentee votes. If the voter's appeal is denied, the provisions of § 24.2-708 shall be applicable, and the
132 officers shall advise the voter that he may vote on presentation of a statement signed by him that he has
133 not received an absentee ballot and subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to
134 § 24.2-1016.

135 D. Absentee ballots may be processed as required by § 24.2-711 by the officers of election at the
136 central absentee voter precinct prior to the closing of the polls but the ballot container shall not be
137 opened and the counting of ballots shall not begin prior to that time. In the case of punch card or mark
138 sense ballots to be inserted in electronic counting equipment, the ballot container may be opened and the
139 absentee ballots may be inserted in the counting equipment prior to the closing of the polls in
140 accordance with procedures prescribed by the State Board, including procedures to preserve ballot
141 secrecy, but no ballot count totals shall be initiated prior to that time.

142 As soon as the polls are closed in the county or city the officers of election at the central absentee
143 voter precinct shall proceed to ascertain and record the vote given by absentee ballot and report the
144 results in the manner provided for counting and reporting ballots generally in Article 4 (§ 24.2-643 et
145 seq.) of Chapter 6 of this title.

146 E. The electoral board may provide that the officers of election for a central absentee voter precinct
147 may be assigned to work all or a portion of the time that the precinct is open on election day subject to
148 the following conditions:

149 1. The chief officer and the assistant chief officer, appointed pursuant to § 24.2-115 to represent the
150 two political parties, are on duty at all times; and

151 2. No officer, political party representative, or other candidate representative shall leave the precinct
152 after any ballots have been counted until the polls are closed and the count for the precinct is completed
153 and reported.