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HOUSE BILL NO. 1598

Offered January 20, 2006

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-603, 24.2-700, and 24.2-701 of the Code of Virginia, relating to elections; polling place hours; and absentee voting procedures.

Patron—Hugo

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-603, 24.2-700, and 24.2-701 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-603. Hours polls to be open; closing the polls.

At all elections, the polls shall be open at each polling place at 6:00 a.m. on the day of the election and closed at ~~7:00~~ 8:00 p.m. on the same day.

At ~~6:45~~ 7:45 p.m. an officer of election shall announce that the polls will close in fifteen minutes. The officers of election shall list the names of all qualified voters in line before the polling place at ~~7:00~~ 8:00 p.m. and permit those voters and no others to vote after ~~7:00~~ 8:00 p.m.

§ 24.2-700. Persons entitled to vote by absentee ballot.

The following registered voters may vote by absentee ballot in accordance with the provisions of this chapter in any election in which they are qualified to vote:

1. Any person who, in the regular and orderly course of his business, profession, or occupation or while on personal business or vacation, will be absent from the county or city in which he is entitled to vote;

2. Any person who is (i) a member of a uniformed service of the United States, as defined in 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff-6 (7), on active duty, or (ii) a member of the merchant marine of the United States, or (iii) who temporarily resides outside of the United States, or (iv) the spouse or dependent residing with any person listed in (i), (ii), or (iii), and who will be absent on the day of the election from the county or city in which he is entitled to vote;

3. Any student attending a school or institution of learning, or his spouse, who will be absent on the day of election from the county or city in which he is entitled to vote;

4. Any person who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of election because of a physical disability or physical illness;

5. Any person who is confined while awaiting trial or for having been convicted of a misdemeanor, provided that the trial or release date is scheduled on or after the third day preceding the election. Any person who is awaiting trial and is a resident of the county or city where he is confined shall, on his request, be taken to the polls to vote on election day if his trial date is postponed and he did not have an opportunity to vote absentee;

6. Any person who is a member of an electoral board, registrar, officer of election, or custodian of voting equipment;

7. Any duly registered person who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of the election because he is primarily and personally responsible for the care of an ill or disabled family member who is confined at home;

8. Any duly registered person who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of the election because of an obligation occasioned by his religion; or

9. Any person who, in the regular and orderly course of his business, profession, or occupation, will be at his place of work and commuting to and from his home to his place of work for ~~eleven~~ 12 or more hours of the ~~thirteen~~ 14 hours that the polls are open pursuant to § 24.2-603.

§ 24.2-701. Application for absentee ballot.

A. The State Board shall furnish each general registrar with a sufficient number of applications for official absentee ballots. The registrars shall furnish applications to persons requesting them.

The State Board shall implement a system that enables eligible persons to request and receive an absentee ballot application electronically through the Internet. Electronic absentee ballot applications shall be in a form approved by the State Board.

Except as provided in § 24.2-703, a separate application shall be completed for each election in which the applicant offers to vote. An application for an absentee ballot may be accepted the later of (i) 12 months before an election, or (ii) the day following any election held in the twelfth month prior to the election in which the applicant is applying to vote.

Any application received before the ballots are printed shall be held and processed as soon as the

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59 printed ballots for the election are available.

60 For the purposes of this chapter, the general registrar's office shall be open a minimum of eight
61 hours between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on the first and second Saturday immediately
62 preceding all general elections, except May general elections held in towns, and on the Saturday
63 immediately preceding any primary election, May general election held in a town, or special election.

64 Unless physically disabled, all applications for absentee ballots shall be signed by the applicant who
65 shall state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that to the
66 best of his knowledge and belief the facts contained in the application are true and correct and that he
67 has not and will not vote in the election at any other place in Virginia or in any other state. If the
68 applicant is unable to sign the application, a person assisting the applicant will note this fact on the
69 applicant signature line and provide his signature, name, and address.

70 B. Applications for absentee ballots shall be completed in the following manner:

71 1. An application completed in person shall be made not less than three days prior to the election in
72 which the applicant offers to vote and completed only in the office of the general registrar. The
73 applicant shall sign the application in the presence of a registrar or a member of the electoral board. The
74 applicant shall provide one of the forms of identification specified in subsection B of § 24.2-643, or if
75 he is unable to present one of the forms of identification listed in that section, he shall sign a statement,
76 subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that he is the named
77 registered voter who he claims to be. An applicant who requires assistance in voting by reason of
78 physical disability or inability to read or write may request assistance pursuant to § 24.2-649 and be
79 assisted in preparation of this statement in accordance with that section. The provisions of § 24.2-649
80 regarding persons who are unable to sign shall be followed when assisting an applicant in completing
81 this statement.

82 For federal elections held after January 1, 2004, this paragraph shall apply in the case of any voter
83 who is required by subparagraph (b) of 42 U.S.C.S. § 15483 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to
84 show identification the first time that voter votes in a federal election in the state. After completing an
85 application for an absentee ballot in person, such voter shall present: (i) a current and valid photo
86 identification; or (ii) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or
87 other document that shows the name and address of the voter. Such individual who desires to vote in
88 person but who does not show one of the forms of identification specified in this paragraph shall be
89 offered a provisional ballot under the provisions of § 24.2-653. Neither the identification requirements of
90 subsection B of § 24.2-643, nor the identification requirements of subsection A of § 24.2-653, shall
91 apply to such voter at that election. The State Board of Elections shall provide instructions to the
92 electoral boards for the handling and counting of such provisional ballots pursuant to subsection B of
93 § 24.2-653 and this section.

94 2. Any other application may be made by mail, electronic or telephonic transmission to a facsimile
95 device if one is available to the office of the general registrar or the office of the State Board if a
96 device is not available locally, or other means. The application shall be on a form furnished by the
97 registrar or, if made under subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700, may be on a Federal Post Card Application
98 prescribed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff (b) (2). The Federal Post Card Application may be accepted
99 the later of (i) 12 months before an election, or (ii) the day following any election held in the twelfth
100 month prior to the election in which the applicant is applying to vote. The application shall be made to
101 the appropriate registrar not less than five days prior to the election in which the applicant offers to
102 vote.

103 C. Applications for absentee ballots shall contain the following information:

104 1. The applicant's printed name and the reason the applicant will be absent or cannot vote at his
105 polling place on the day of the election;

106 2. A statement that he is registered in the county or city in which he offers to vote and his residence
107 address in such county or city. Any person temporarily residing outside the United States shall provide
108 the last date of residency at his Virginia residence address, if that residence is no longer available to
109 him. Any person who makes application under subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700 who is not a registered voter
110 may file the applications to register and for a ballot simultaneously;

111 3. The complete address to which the ballot is to be sent directly to the applicant, unless the
112 application is made in person at a time when the printed ballots for the election are available and the
113 applicant chooses to vote in person at the time of completing his application. The address given shall be
114 either the address of the applicant on file in the registration records or the address at which he will be
115 located while absent from his county or city. No ballot shall be sent to, or in care of, any other person;
116 and

117 4. In the case of a person, or the spouse or dependent of a person, who is on active service as a
118 member of the armed forces of the United States or a member of the merchant marine of the United
119 States, the branch of service to which he or the spouse belongs, and his or the spouse's rank, grade, or
120 rate, and service identification number; or

121 5. In the case of a student, or the spouse of a student, who is attending a school or institution of
122 learning, the name and address of the school or institution of learning; or

123 6. In the case of a person who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of the election
124 because of a physical disability or physical illness, the nature of the illness or disability; or

125 7. In the case of a person who is confined awaiting trial or for having been convicted of a
126 misdemeanor, the name and address of the institution of confinement; or

127 8. In the case of a person who will be absent on election day for business reasons, the name of his
128 employer or business; or

129 9. In the case of a person who will be absent on election day for personal business or vacation
130 reasons, the name of the county or city in Virginia or the state or country to which he is traveling; or

131 10. In the case of a person who is unable to go to the polls on the day of election because he is
132 primarily and personally responsible for the care of an ill or disabled family member who is confined at
133 home, the name of the family member and the nature of his illness or disability; or

134 11. In the case of a person who is unable to go to the polls on the day of election because of an
135 obligation occasioned by his religion, his religion and the nature of the obligation; or

136 12. In the case of a person who, in the regular and orderly course of his business, profession, or
137 occupation, will be at his place of work and commuting to and from his home to his place of work for
138 ~~44~~ 12 or more hours of the ~~43~~ 14 hours that the polls are open pursuant to § 24.2-603, the name of his
139 business or employer, address of his place of work, and hours he will be at the workplace and
140 commuting on election day.