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HOUSE BILL NO. 1877

Offered January 14, 2009

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A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-700, 24.2-701, and 24.2-706 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the absentee voting process; first responders.

Patrons—Cosgrove, Athey and Rust

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-700, 24.2-701, and 24.2-706 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 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 duly registered person with a disability, as defined in § 24.2-101, who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of election because of his disability, illness, or pregnancy;

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 or more hours of the thirteen hours that the polls are open pursuant to § 24.2-603; or

10. Any person who is a law-enforcement officer, as defined in § 18.2-51.1; firefighter, as defined in § 65.2-102; volunteer firefighter, as defined in § 27-42; search and rescue personnel, as defined in § 18.2-51.1; or emergency medical services personnel, as defined in § 32.1-111.1.

§ 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 printed ballots for the election are available.

For the purposes of this chapter, the general registrar's office shall be open a minimum of eight

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59 hours between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on the first and second Saturday immediately
60 preceding all general elections, except May general elections held in towns, and on the Saturday
61 immediately preceding any primary election, May general election held in a town, or special election.

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

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

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

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

92 2. Any other application may be made by mail, electronic or telephonic transmission to a facsimile
93 device if one is available to the office of the general registrar or the office of the State Board if a
94 device is not available locally, or other means. The application shall be on a form furnished by the
95 registrar or, if made under subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700, may be on a Federal Post Card Application
96 prescribed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1973ff (b) (2). The Federal Post Card Application may be accepted
97 the later of (i) 12 months before an election, or (ii) the day following any election held in the twelfth
98 month prior to the election in which the applicant is applying to vote. The application shall be made to
99 the appropriate registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. on the seventh day prior to the election in which the
100 applicant offers to vote.

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

102 1. The applicant's printed name, the last four digits of the applicant's social security number, and the
103 reason the applicant will be absent or cannot vote at his polling place on the day of the election;

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

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

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

120 5. In the case of a student, or the spouse of a student, who is attending a school or institution of

learning, the name and address of the school or institution of learning; or

6. In the case of any duly registered person with a disability, as defined in § 24.2-101, who is unable to go in person to the polls on the day of the election because of his disability, illness, or pregnancy, the nature of the disability, illness, or pregnancy; or

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

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

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

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

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

12. In the case of a 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 11 or more hours of the 13 hours that the polls are open pursuant to § 24.2-603, the name of his business or employer, address of his place of work, and hours he will be at the workplace and commuting on election day; or

13. In the case of a law-enforcement officer, as defined in § 18.2-51.1; firefighter, as defined in § 65.2-102; volunteer firefighter, as defined in § 27-42; search and rescue personnel, as defined in § 18.2-51.1; or emergency medical services personnel, as defined in § 32.1-111.1, his position and the name of the locality and department or squad in which he serves.

§ 24.2-706. Duty of general registrar and electoral board on receipt of application; statement of voter.

On receipt of an application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar shall enroll the name and address of each registered applicant on an absentee voter applicant list that shall be maintained in the office of the general registrar with a file of the applications of the listed applicants. The list and the applications shall be available for inspection and copying by any registered voter during regular office hours.

No list or application containing an individual's social security number, or any part thereof, or the individual's day and month of birth, shall be made available for inspection or copying by anyone. The State Board of Elections shall prescribe procedures for local electoral boards and general registrars to make the information in the lists and applications available in a manner that does not reveal social security numbers or parts thereof, or an individual's day and month of birth.

The completion and timely delivery of an application for an absentee ballot shall be construed to be an offer by the applicant to vote in the election.

The general registrar shall note on each application received whether the applicant is or is not a registered voter and notify the secretary of the electoral board. In reviewing the application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar and electoral board shall not reject the application of any individual because of an error or omission on any record or paper relating to the application, if such error or omission is not material in determining whether such individual is qualified to vote absentee.

If the application has been properly completed and signed and the applicant is a registered voter of the precinct in which he offers to vote, the electoral board shall ~~immediately~~ *within three business days of receiving an application for an absentee ballot, or as soon thereafter as is reasonably possible*, send to the applicant by mail, obtaining a certificate of mailing, or deliver to him in person in the office of the secretary or registrar, the following items and nothing else:

1. An envelope containing the folded ballot, sealed and marked "Ballot within. Do not open except in presence of a witness."

2. An envelope, with printing only on the flap side, for resealing the marked ballot, on which envelope is printed the following:

"Statement of Voter."

"I do hereby state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that my FULL NAME is (last, first, middle); that I am now or have been at some time since last November's general election a legal resident of (STATE YOUR LEGAL RESIDENCE IN VIRGINIA including the house number, street name or rural route address, city, zip code); that I received the enclosed ballot(s) upon application to the registrar of such county or city; that I opened the envelope marked 'ballot within' and marked the ballot(s) in the presence of the witness, without

assistance or knowledge on the part of anyone as to the manner in which I marked it (or I am returning the form required to report how I was assisted); that I then sealed the ballot(s) in this envelope; and that I have not voted and will not vote in this election at any other time or place.

Signature of Voter

Date

Signature of witness"

For elections held after January 1, 2004, instead of the envelope containing the above oath, an envelope containing the standard oath prescribed by the presidential designee under section 101 (b) (7) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. § 1973ff et seq.) shall be sent to voters who are qualified to vote absentee under that Act.

3. A properly addressed envelope for the return of the ballot to the electoral board by mail or by the applicant in person.

4. Printed instructions for completing the ballot and statement on the envelope and returning the ballot.

For federal elections held after January 1, 2004, for any voter who is required by subparagraph (b) of 42 U.S.C.S. § 15483 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to show identification the first time the voter votes in a federal election in the state, the printed instructions shall direct the voter to submit with his ballot: (i) a copy of a current and valid photo identification; or (ii) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other document that shows the name and address of the voter. Such individual who desires to vote by mail but who does not submit one of the forms of identification specified in this paragraph may cast such ballot by mail and the ballot shall be counted as a provisional ballot under the provisions of § 24.2-653. The State Board of Elections shall provide instructions to the electoral boards for the handling and counting of such provisional ballots pursuant to subsection B of § 24.2-653 and this section.

5. For any voter entitled to vote absentee under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. § 1973ff et seq.), information provided by the State Board specific to the voting rights and responsibilities for such citizens, or information provided by the registrar specific to the status of the voter registration and absentee ballot application of such voter, may be included.

The envelopes and instructions shall be in the form prescribed by the State Board.

If the applicant makes his application to vote in person under § 24.2-701 at a time when the printed ballots for the election are available, the general registrar or the secretary of the electoral board, on the determination of the qualifications of the applicant to vote, shall provide to the applicant the items set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4, and no item shall be removed by the applicant from the office of the general registrar or the secretary of the electoral board. On the request of the applicant, made no later than 5:00 p.m. on the seventh day prior to the election in which the applicant offers to vote, the general registrar or the secretary may send the items set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4 to the applicant by mail, obtaining a certificate of mailing.

If the applicant states as the reason for his absence on election day any of the reasons set forth in subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700, the electoral board shall mail or deliver in person to the applicant in the office of the secretary or general registrar, the items as set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4 and, if necessary, an application for registration. A certificate of mailing shall not be required. The electoral board shall send the blank ballot, the form for the envelope for returning the marked ballot, and instructions to the voter by electronic transmission if the voter so requests and if the applicant voter is residing or is stationed outside the continental borders of the United States. The voted ballot shall be returned to the electoral board as otherwise required by this chapter.

When the statement prescribed in subdivision 2 has been properly completed and signed by the registered voter and witnessed, his ballot shall not be subject to challenge pursuant to § 24.2-651.

The circuit courts shall have jurisdiction to issue an injunction to enforce the provisions of this section upon the application of (i) any aggrieved voter, (ii) any candidate in an election district in whole or in part in the court's jurisdiction where a violation of this section has occurred, or is likely to occur, or (iii) the campaign committee or the appropriate district political party chairman of such candidate.