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HOUSE BILL NO. 1278

Offered January 20, 2012

A *BILL to amend and reenact §§ 19.2-327.2, 19.2-327.3, 19.2-327.10, and 19.2-327.11 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the issuance of a writ of actual innocence.*

 Patron—Morrissey

 Referred to Committee for Courts of Justice

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 19.2-327.2, 19.2-327.3, 19.2-327.10, and 19.2-327.11 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 19.2-327.2. Issuance of writ of actual innocence based on biological evidence.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law or rule of court, upon a petition of a person who was convicted of a felony upon a plea of not guilty, or for any person, regardless of the plea, sentenced to death, or convicted of (i) a Class 1 felony, (ii) a Class 2 felony or (iii) any felony for which the maximum penalty is imprisonment for life, the Supreme Court shall have the authority to issue writs of actual innocence under this chapter. The writ shall lie to the circuit court that entered the felony conviction; and that court shall have the authority to conduct hearings, as provided for in § 19.2-327.5, on such a petition as directed by order from the Supreme Court.

§ 19.2-327.3. Contents and form of the petition based on previously unknown or untested human biological evidence of actual innocence.

A. The petitioner shall allege categorically and with specificity, under oath, the following: (i) the crime for which the petitioner was convicted; ~~and that such conviction was upon a plea of not guilty or that the person is under a sentence of death or convicted of (1) a Class 1 felony, (2) a Class 2 felony or (3) any felony for which the maximum penalty is imprisonment for life;~~ (ii) that the petitioner is actually innocent of the crime for which he was convicted; (iii) an exact description of the human biological evidence and the scientific testing supporting the allegation of innocence; (iv) that the evidence was not previously known or available to the petitioner or his trial attorney of record at the time the conviction became final in the circuit court, or if known, the reason that the evidence was not subject to the scientific testing set forth in the petition; (v) the date the test results under § 19.2-327.1 became known to the petitioner or any attorney of record; (vi) that the petitioner or his attorney of record has filed the petition within 60 days of obtaining the test results under § 19.2-327.1; (vii) the reason or reasons the evidence ~~will prove that no rational trier of fact could have found proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt would have created in a rational trier of fact reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the petitioner;~~ and (viii) for any conviction that became final in the circuit court after June 30, 1996, that the evidence was not available for testing under § 9.1-1104. The Supreme Court may issue a stay of execution pending proceedings under the petition. Nothing in this chapter shall constitute grounds to delay setting an execution date pursuant to § 53.1-232.1 or to grant a stay of execution that has been set pursuant to § 53.1-232.1 (iii) or (iv).

B. Such petition shall contain all relevant allegations of facts that are known to the petitioner at the time of filing and shall enumerate and include all previous records, applications, petitions, appeals and their dispositions. A copy of any test results shall be filed with the petition. The petition shall be filed on a form provided by the Supreme Court. If the petitioner fails to submit a completed form, the court may dismiss the petition or return the petition to the prisoner pending the completion of such form. The petitioner shall be responsible for all statements contained in the petition. Any false statement in the petition, if such statement is knowingly or willfully made, shall be a ground for prosecution and conviction of perjury as provided for in § 18.2-434.

C. The Supreme Court shall not accept the petition unless it is accompanied by a duly executed return of service in the form of a verification that a copy of the petition and all attachments has been served on the attorney for the Commonwealth of the jurisdiction where the conviction occurred and the Attorney General or an acceptance of service signed by these officials, or any combination thereof. The Attorney General shall have 30 days after receipt of the record by the clerk of the Supreme Court in which to file a response to the petition. The response may contain a proffer of any evidence pertaining to the guilt of the defendant that is not included in the record of the case, including evidence that was suppressed at trial.

D. The Supreme Court may, when the case has been before a trial or appellate court, inspect the record of any trial or appellate court action, and the Court may, in any case, award a writ of certiorari to the clerk of the respective court below, and have brought before the Court the whole record or any

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59 part of any record.

60 E. In any petition filed pursuant to this chapter, the defendant is entitled to representation by counsel
61 subject to the provisions of Article 3 (§ 19.2-157 et seq.) of Chapter 10 of this title.

62 § 19.2-327.10. Issuance of writ of actual innocence based on nonbiological evidence.

63 Notwithstanding any other provision of law or rule of court, upon a petition of a person who was
64 convicted of a felony ~~upon a plea of not guilty~~, the Court of Appeals shall have the authority to issue
65 writs of actual innocence under this chapter. ~~Only one such writ based upon such conviction may be~~
66 ~~filed by a petitioner.~~ The writ shall lie to the court that entered the conviction; and that court shall have
67 the authority to conduct hearings, as provided for in this chapter, on such a petition as directed by order
68 from the Court of Appeals. In accordance with §§ 17.1-411 and 19.2-317, either party may appeal a
69 final decision of the Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court of Virginia. Upon an appeal from the Court
70 of Appeals, the Supreme Court of Virginia shall have the authority to issue writs in accordance with the
71 provisions of this chapter.

72 § 19.2-327.11. Contents and form of the petition based on previously unknown or unavailable
73 evidence of actual innocence.

74 A. The petitioner shall allege categorically and with specificity, under oath, all of the following: (i)
75 the crime for which the petitioner was convicted, ~~and that such conviction was upon a plea of not~~
76 ~~guilty~~; (ii) that the petitioner is actually innocent of the crime for which he was convicted; (iii) an exact
77 description of the previously unknown or unavailable evidence supporting the allegation of innocence;
78 (iv) that such evidence was previously unknown or unavailable to the petitioner or his trial attorney of
79 record at the time the conviction became final in the circuit court; (v) the date the previously unknown
80 or unavailable evidence became known or available to the petitioner, and the circumstances under which
81 it was discovered; (vi) that the previously unknown or unavailable evidence is such as could not, by the
82 exercise of diligence, have been discovered or obtained before the expiration of 21 days following entry
83 of the final order of conviction by the court; (vii) the previously unknown or unavailable evidence is
84 material and when considered with all of the other evidence in the current record, ~~will prove that no~~
85 ~~rational trier of fact could have found proof of guilt beyond a would have created in a rational trier of~~
86 ~~fact~~ reasonable doubt ~~as to the guilt of the petitioner~~; and (viii) the previously unknown or unavailable
87 evidence is not merely cumulative, corroborative or collateral. Nothing in this chapter shall constitute
88 grounds to delay setting an execution date pursuant to § 53.1-232.1 or to grant a stay of execution that
89 has been set pursuant to clause (iii) or clause (iv) of § 53.1-232.1 or to delay or stay any other
90 post-conviction appeals or petitions to any court. Human biological evidence may not be used as the
91 sole basis for seeking relief under this writ but may be used in conjunction with other evidence.

92 B. Such petition shall contain all relevant allegations of facts that are known to the petitioner at the
93 time of filing, shall be accompanied by all relevant documents, affidavits and test results, and shall
94 enumerate and include all relevant previous records, applications, petitions, appeals and their
95 dispositions. The petition shall be filed on a form provided by the Supreme Court. If the petitioner fails
96 to submit a completed form, the Court of Appeals may dismiss the petition or return the petition to the
97 petitioner pending the completion of such form. Any false statement in the petition, if such statement is
98 knowingly or willfully made, shall be a ground for prosecution of perjury as provided for in § 18.2-434.

99 C. In cases brought by counsel for the petitioner, the Court of Appeals shall not accept the petition
100 unless it is accompanied by a duly executed return of service in the form of a verification that a copy of
101 the petition and all attachments have been served on the attorney for the Commonwealth of the
102 jurisdiction where the conviction occurred and the Attorney General, or an acceptance of service signed
103 by these officials, or any combination thereof. In cases brought by petitioners pro se, the Court of
104 Appeals shall not accept the petition unless it is accompanied by a certificate that a copy of the petition
105 and all attachments have been sent, by certified mail, to the attorney for the Commonwealth of the
106 jurisdiction where the conviction occurred and the Attorney General. If the Court of Appeals does not
107 summarily dismiss the petition, it shall so notify in writing the Attorney General, the attorney for the
108 Commonwealth, and the petitioner. The Attorney General shall have 60 days after receipt of such notice
109 in which to file a response to the petition that may be extended for good cause shown; however, nothing
110 shall prevent the Attorney General from filing an earlier response. The response may contain a proffer
111 of any evidence pertaining to the guilt of the petitioner that is not included in the record of the case,
112 including evidence that was suppressed at trial.

113 D. The Court of Appeals may inspect the record of any trial or appellate court action, and the Court
114 may, in any case, award a writ of certiorari to the clerk of the respective court below, and have brought
115 before the Court the whole record or any part of any record. If, in the judgment of the Court, the
116 petition fails to state a claim, or if the assertions of previously unknown or unavailable evidence, even if
117 true, would fail to qualify for the granting of relief under this chapter, the Court may dismiss the
118 petition summarily, without any hearing or a response from the Attorney General.

119 E. In any petition filed pursuant to this chapter that is not summarily dismissed, the defendant is
120 entitled to representation by counsel subject to the provisions of Article 3 (§ 19.2-157 et seq.) and

121 Article 4 (§ 19.2-163.1 et seq.) of Chapter 10 of this title. The Court of Appeals may, in its discretion,
122 appoint counsel prior to deciding whether a petition should be summarily dismissed.

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