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HOUSE BILL NO. 596

Offered January 8, 2014

Prefiled January 7, 2014

A BILL to amend and reenact § 8.01-126 of the Code of Virginia, relating to summons for unlawful detainer issued by magistrate or clerk or judge of a general district court.

Patron—Miller

Referred to Committee for Courts of Justice

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 8.01-126 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 8.01-126. Summons for unlawful detainer issued by magistrate or clerk or judge of a general district court.**

A. In any case when possession of any house, land or tenement is unlawfully detained by the person in possession thereof, the landlord, his agent, attorney, or other person, entitled to the possession may present to a magistrate or a clerk or judge of a general district court a statement under oath of the facts which authorize the removal of the tenant or other person in possession, describing such premises; and thereupon such magistrate, clerk or judge shall issue his summons against the person or persons named in such affidavit. The process issued upon any such summons issued by a magistrate, clerk or judge may be served as provided in § 8.01-293, 8.01-296, or 8.01-299. When issued by a magistrate it may be returned to and the case heard and determined by the judge of a general district court. If the summons for unlawful detainer is filed to terminate a tenancy pursuant to the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act (§ 55-248.2 et seq.), the initial hearing on such summons shall occur as soon as practicable, but not more than 21 days from the date of filing. If the case cannot be heard within 21 days from the date of filing, the initial hearing shall be held as soon as practicable. If the plaintiff requests that the initial hearing be set on a date later than 21 days from the date of filing, the initial hearing shall be set on a date the plaintiff is available that is also available for the court. Such summons shall be served at least 10 days before the return day thereof.

B. Notwithstanding any other rule of court or provision of law to the contrary, the plaintiff in an unlawful detainer case may submit into evidence a photocopy of a properly executed paper document or paper printout of an electronically stored document including a copy of the original lease or other documents, provided that the plaintiff provides an affidavit or sworn testimony that the copy of such document is a true and accurate copy of the original lease. An attorney or agent of the landlord or managing agent may present such affidavit into evidence.

C. Notwithstanding any other rule of court or provision of law to the contrary, when the defendant does not make an appearance in court, the plaintiff or the plaintiff's attorney or agent may include in the affidavit entered into evidence pursuant to subsection B a statement of the amount of outstanding rent, late charges, attorney fees, and any other charges or damages due as of the date of the hearing. Upon request of the plaintiff or the plaintiff's attorney or agent, if the court determines that the affidavit accurately sets forth the amount due the plaintiff, the court shall *permit amendment of the amount requested on the summons for unlawful detainer filed in court in accordance with the affidavit and shall enter a judgment for such amount due as of the date of the hearing* in addition to entering an order of possession for the premises.

INTRODUCED

HB596