

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact § 16.1-77 of the Code of Virginia, relating to interpleader; funds held in escrow.

[H 577]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 16.1-77 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 16.1-77. Civil jurisdiction of general district courts.

Except as provided in Article 5 (§ 16.1-122.1 et seq.) of this chapter, each general district court shall have, within the limits of the territory it serves, civil jurisdiction as follows:

(1) Exclusive original jurisdiction of any claim to specific personal property or to any debt, fine or other money, or to damages for breach of contract or for injury done to property, real or personal, or for any injury to the person that would be recoverable by action at law or suit in equity, when the amount of such claim does not exceed \$4,500 exclusive of interest and any attorney's fees contracted for in the instrument, and concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts having jurisdiction in such territory of any such claim when the amount thereof exceeds \$4,500 but does not exceed \$25,000, exclusive of interest and any attorney's fees contracted for in the instrument. However, this \$25,000 limit shall not apply with respect to distress warrants under the provisions of § 55-230, cases involving liquidated damages for violations of vehicle weight limits pursuant to § 46.2-1135, nor cases involving forfeiture of a bond pursuant to § 19.2-143.

(2) Jurisdiction to try and decide attachment cases when the amount of the plaintiff's claim does not exceed \$25,000 exclusive of interest and any attorney's fees contracted for in the instrument.

(3) Jurisdiction of actions of unlawful entry or detainer as provided in Article 13 (§ 8.01-124 et seq.) of Chapter 3 of Title 8.01, and in Chapter 13 (§ 55-217 et seq.) of Title 55, and the maximum jurisdictional limits prescribed in subdivision (1) shall not apply to any claim, counter-claim or cross-claim in an unlawful detainer action that includes a claim for damages sustained or rent against any person obligated on the lease or guarantee of such lease.

(4) Except where otherwise specifically provided, all jurisdiction, power and authority over any civil action or proceeding conferred upon any general district court judge or magistrate under or by virtue of any provisions of the Code of Virginia.

(5) Jurisdiction to try and decide suits in interpleader involving personal or real property where the amount of money or value of the property is not more than the maximum jurisdictional limits of the general district court. However, the maximum jurisdictional limits prescribed in subdivision (1) shall not apply to any claim, counter-claim, or cross-claim in an interpleader action that is limited to the disposition of an earnest money deposit pursuant to a real estate purchase contract. The action shall be brought in accordance with the procedures for interpleader as set forth in § 8.01-364. However, the general district court shall not have any power to issue injunctions. Actions in interpleader may be brought by either the stakeholder or any of the claimants. The initial pleading shall be either by motion for judgment, by warrant in debt, or by other uniform court form established by the Supreme Court of Virginia. The initial pleading shall briefly set forth the circumstances of the claim and shall name as defendant all parties in interest who are not parties plaintiff. *Service of process of such pleading shall be made in accordance with Chapter 8 (§ 8.01-285 et seq.) of Title 8.01. In any interpleader case before the court involving an earnest money deposit or other funds held in escrow by a real estate broker as defined in § 54.1-2100, such funds shall be treated as abandoned intangible personal property in accordance with §§ 55-210.8 and 55-210.10.2; however, the court may enter an order directing the funds be paid to (i) one or more of the stakeholders or (ii) the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, payable to the State Treasurer, and credited to the Virginia Housing Trust Fund established pursuant to § 36-142, provided that, in the case of clause (ii), (a) such funds have been abandoned for more than one year from the date of written notice from the real estate broker holding such escrow funds to all stakeholders and claimants and (b) the plaintiff and defendants are in default in such interpleader action. Any party may exercise a right of appeal to the circuit court under § 8.01-129. In the event that judgment is vacated under § 8.01-428, the judge may enter an order directing the State Treasurer to refund such funds to the court escrow account within one year of the entry of the order directing such funds to be paid to the Virginia Housing Trust Fund.*

(6) Jurisdiction to try and decide any cases pursuant to § 2.2-3713 of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (§ 2.2-3700 et seq.) or § 2.2-3809 of the Government Data Collection and

57 Dissemination Practices Act, for writs of mandamus or for injunctions.

58 (7) Concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts having jurisdiction in such territory to adjudicate
59 habitual offenders pursuant to the provisions of Article 9 (§ 46.2-355.1 et seq.) of Chapter 3 of Title
60 46.2.

61 (8) Jurisdiction to try and decide cases alleging a civil violation described in § 18.2-76.

62 (9) Jurisdiction to try and decide any cases pursuant to § 55-79.80:2 of the Condominium Act
63 (§ 55-79.39 et seq.) or § 55-513 of the Property Owners' Association Act (§ 55-508 et seq.).