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## SENATE BILL NO. 594

Offered January 13, 2016

Prefiled January 13, 2016

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 32.1-263 of the Code of Virginia, relating to electronic registration of certificates of death.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patron—Alexander

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Referred to Committee on Education and Health

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That § 32.1-263 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 32.1-263. Filing death certificates; medical certification; investigation by Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.**

A. A death certificate, including, if known, the social security number or control number issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342 of the deceased, shall be filed *electronically, using the electronic death registration system established by the Department*, for each death ~~which that~~ occurs in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth with the registrar of the district in which the death occurred within three days after such death and prior to final disposition or removal of the body from the Commonwealth; and shall be registered by such registrar if it has been completed and filed in accordance with the following requirements:

1. If the place of death is unknown; but the dead body is found in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth, a death certificate shall be filed in the registration district in which the dead body is found in accordance with this section. The place where the dead body is found shall be shown as the place of death. If the date of death is unknown, it shall be determined by approximation, taking into consideration all relevant information, including but not limited to; information provided by the immediate family regarding the date and time that the deceased was last seen alive; if the individual died in his home; and

2. When death occurs in a moving conveyance; in the United States of ~~America~~ and the body is first removed from the conveyance in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth and the place where it is first removed shall be considered the place of death. When a death occurs on a moving conveyance while in international waters or air space or in a foreign country or its air space and the body is first removed from the conveyance in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in ~~this the~~ Commonwealth but the certificate shall show the actual place of death insofar as can be determined.

B. The licensed funeral director, funeral service licensee, office of the state anatomical program, or next of kin as defined in § 54.1-2800 who first assumes custody of a dead body shall *electronically* file the certificate of death with the registrar. He shall obtain the personal data, including the social security number of the deceased or control number issued to the deceased by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342, from the next of kin or the ~~best qualified~~ *best-qualified* person or source available and obtain the medical certification from the person responsible therefor.

C. The medical certification shall be completed; ~~signed in black or dark blue ink, and returned to the funeral director electronically, using the electronic death registration system established by the Department~~, within 24 hours after death by the physician in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition ~~which that~~ resulted in death, except when inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § 32.1-283 or 32.1-285.1, or by the physician ~~that~~ *who* pronounces death pursuant to § 54.1-2972.

In the absence of such physician or with his approval, the certificate may be completed and signed *electronically* by the following: (i) another physician employed or engaged by the same professional practice; (ii) a physician assistant supervised by such physician; (iii) a nurse practitioner practicing as part of a patient care team as defined in § 54.1-2900; (iv) the chief medical officer or medical director, or his designee, of the institution, hospice, or nursing home in which death occurred; (v) a physician specializing in the delivery of health care to hospitalized or emergency department patients who is employed by or engaged by the facility where the death occurred; (vi) the physician who performed an autopsy upon the decedent; or (vii) an individual to whom the physician has delegated authority to complete and sign the certificate; if such individual has access to the medical history of the case and death is due to natural causes.

D. When inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § 32.1-283 or 32.1-285.1, the Chief Medical Examiner shall cause an investigation of the cause of death to be made and the medical certification portion of the death certificate to be completed and signed

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SB594

59 *electronically* within 24 hours after being notified of the death. If the Office of the Chief Medical  
60 Examiner refuses jurisdiction, the physician last furnishing medical care to the deceased shall prepare  
61 and sign the medical certification portion of the death certificate.

62 E. If the death is a natural death and a death certificate is being prepared pursuant to § 54.1-2972  
63 and the physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant is uncertain about the cause of death, he  
64 shall use his best medical judgment to certify a reasonable cause of death or contact the health district  
65 physician director in the district where the death occurred to obtain guidance in reaching a determination  
66 as to a cause of death and document the same.

67 If the cause of death cannot be determined within 24 hours after death, the medical certification shall  
68 be completed *electronically* as provided by regulations of the Board. The attending physician or the  
69 Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief Medical Examiner, or a medical examiner appointed  
70 pursuant to § 32.1-282 shall give the funeral director or person acting as such notice of the reason for  
71 the delay, and final disposition of the body shall not be made until authorized by the attending  
72 physician, the Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief Medical Examiner, or a medical examiner  
73 appointed pursuant to § 32.1-282.

74 F. A physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant who, in good faith, signs a certificate of  
75 death or determines the cause of death shall be immune from civil liability; only for such signature and  
76 determination of causes of death on such certificate, absent gross negligence or willful misconduct.