

# VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2017 SESSION

## CHAPTER 641

*An Act to amend and reenact §§ 19.2-54 and 19.2-56 of the Code of Virginia, relating to search warrants.*

[H 1874]

Approved March 20, 2017

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That §§ 19.2-54 and 19.2-56 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 19.2-54. Affidavit preliminary to issuance of search warrant; general search warrant prohibited; effect of failure to file affidavit.**

No search warrant shall be issued until there is filed with the officer authorized to issue the same an affidavit of some person reasonably describing the place, thing, or person to be searched, the things or persons to be searched for thereunder, alleging briefly material facts, constituting the probable cause for the issuance of such warrant and alleging substantially the offense in relation to which such search is to be made and that the object, thing, or person searched for constitutes evidence of the commission of such offense. The affidavit may be filed by electronically transmitted (i) facsimile process or (ii) electronic record as defined in § 59.1-480. Such affidavit shall be certified by the officer who issues such warrant and delivered in person; mailed by certified mail, return receipt requested; or delivered by electronically transmitted facsimile process or by use of filing and security procedures as defined in the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (§ 59.1-479 et seq.) for transmitting signed documents, by such officer or his designee or agent, to the clerk of the circuit court of the county or city wherein the search is made, ~~with a copy of the affidavit also being delivered to the clerk of the circuit court of the county or city where the warrant is issued, if in a different county or city,~~ within seven days after the issuance of such warrant and shall by such ~~clerk~~ *clerk* be preserved as a record and shall at all times be subject to inspection by the public after the warrant that is the subject of the affidavit has been executed or 15 days after issuance of the warrant, whichever is earlier; however, such affidavit, any warrant issued pursuant thereto, any return made thereon, and any order sealing the affidavit, warrant, or return may be temporarily sealed for a specific period of time by the appropriate court upon application of the attorney for the Commonwealth for good cause shown in an ex parte hearing. Any individual arrested and claiming to be aggrieved by such search and seizure or any person who claims to be entitled to lawful possession of such property seized may move the appropriate court for the unsealing of such affidavit, warrant, and return. The burden of proof with respect to continued sealing shall be upon the Commonwealth. Each such clerk shall maintain an index of all such affidavits filed in his office in order to facilitate inspection. No such warrant shall be issued on an affidavit omitting such essentials, and no general warrant for the search of a house, place, compartment, vehicle or baggage shall be issued. The term "affidavit" as used in this section, means statements made under oath or affirmation and preserved verbatim.

Failure of the officer issuing such warrant to file the required affidavit shall not invalidate any search made under the warrant unless such failure shall continue for a period of 30 days. If the affidavit is filed prior to the expiration of the 30-day period, nevertheless, evidence obtained in any such search shall not be admissible until a reasonable time after the filing of the required affidavit.

**§ 19.2-56. To whom search warrant directed; what it shall command; warrant to show date and time of issuance; copy of affidavit to be part of warrant and served therewith; warrants not executed within 15 days.**

The judge, magistrate or other official authorized to issue criminal warrants, shall issue a search warrant if he finds from the facts or circumstances recited in the affidavit that there is probable cause for the issuance thereof.

Every search warrant shall be directed to (i) the sheriff, sergeant, or any policeman of the county, city or town in which the place to be searched is located, (ii) any law-enforcement officer or agent employed by the Commonwealth and vested with the powers of sheriffs and police, or (iii) jointly to any such sheriff, sergeant, policeman or law-enforcement officer or agent and an agent, special agent or officer of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the United States Treasury, the United States Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the United States Department of Homeland Security, any inspector, law-enforcement official or police personnel of the United States Postal Service, or the Drug Enforcement Administration. The warrant shall ~~(i)~~ (a) name the affiant, ~~(ii)~~ (b) recite the offense in relation to which the search is to be made, ~~(iii)~~ (c) name or describe the place to be searched, ~~(iv)~~ (d) describe the property or person to be searched for, and ~~(v)~~ (e) recite that the magistrate has found probable cause to believe that the property or person constitutes evidence of a crime (identified in the warrant) or tends to show that a person (named or described

therein) has committed or is committing a crime.

The warrant shall command that the place be forthwith searched, either in day or night, and that the objects or persons described in the warrant, if found there, be seized. An inventory shall be produced before a court having jurisdiction of the offense in relation to which the warrant was issued as provided in § 19.2-57.

Any such warrant as provided in this section shall be executed by the policeman or other law-enforcement officer or agent into whose hands it shall come or be delivered. If the warrant is directed jointly to a sheriff, sergeant, policeman or law-enforcement officer or agent of the Commonwealth and a federal agent or officer as otherwise provided in this section, the warrant may be executed jointly or by the policeman, law-enforcement officer or agent into whose hands it is delivered. No other person may be permitted to be present during or participate in the execution of a warrant to search a place except ~~(i)~~ (1) the owners and occupants of the place to be searched when permitted to be present by the officer in charge of the conduct of the search and ~~(ii)~~ (2) persons designated by the officer in charge of the conduct of the search to assist or provide expertise in the conduct of the search.

Any search warrant for records or other information pertaining to a subscriber to, or customer of, an electronic communication service or remote computing service, whether a domestic corporation or foreign corporation, that is transacting or has transacted any business in the Commonwealth, to be executed upon such service provider may be executed within or without the Commonwealth by hand, United States mail, commercial delivery service, facsimile, or other electronic means upon the service provider. Notwithstanding the provisions of § 19.2-57, the officer executing a warrant pursuant to this paragraph shall endorse the date of execution thereon and shall file the warrant, with the inventory attached (or a notation that no property was seized) and the accompanying affidavit, unless such affidavit was made by voice or videotape recording, within three days after the materials ordered to be produced are received by the officer from the service provider. The return shall be made in the circuit court clerk's office for the jurisdiction wherein the warrant was issued. Saturdays, Sundays, or any federal or state legal holiday shall not be used in computing the three-day filing period.

Electronic communication service or remote computing service providers, whether a foreign or domestic corporation, shall also provide the contents of electronic communications pursuant to a search warrant issued under this section and § 19.2-70.3 using the same process described in the preceding paragraph.

*Notwithstanding the provisions of § 19.2-57, any search warrant for records or other information pertaining to a customer of a financial institution as defined in § 6.2-604, money transmitter as defined in § 6.2-1900, commercial business providing credit history or credit reports, or issuer as defined in § 6.2-424 may be executed within the Commonwealth by hand, United States mail, commercial delivery service, facsimile, or other electronic means upon the financial institution, money transmitter, commercial business providing credit history or credit reports, or issuer. The officer executing such warrant shall endorse the date of execution thereon and shall file the warrant, with the inventory attached (or a notation that no property was seized) and the accompanying affidavit, unless such affidavit was made by voice or videotape recording, within three days after the materials ordered to be produced are received by the officer from the financial institution, money transmitter, commercial business providing credit history or credit reports, or issuer. The return shall be made in the circuit court clerk's office for the jurisdiction wherein the warrant was executed. Saturdays, Sundays, or any federal or state legal holiday shall not be used in computing the three-day filing period. For the purposes of this section, the warrant will be considered executed in the jurisdiction where the entity on which the warrant is served is located.*

Every search warrant shall contain the date and time it was issued. However, the failure of any such search warrant to contain the date and time it was issued shall not render the warrant void, provided that the date and time of issuing of said warrant is established by competent evidence.

The judge, magistrate, or other official authorized to issue criminal warrants shall attach a copy of the affidavit required by § 19.2-54, which shall become a part of the search warrant and served therewith. However, this provision shall not be applicable in any case in which the affidavit is made by means of a voice or videotape recording or where the affidavit has been sealed pursuant to § 19.2-54.

Any search warrant not executed within 15 days after issuance thereof shall be returned to, and voided by, the officer who issued such search warrant.

For the purposes of this section:

"Foreign corporation" means any corporation or other entity, whose primary place of business is located outside of the boundaries of the Commonwealth, that makes a contract or engages in a terms of service agreement with a resident of the Commonwealth to be performed in whole or in part by either party in the Commonwealth, or a corporation that has been issued a certificate of authority pursuant to § 13.1-759 to transact business in the Commonwealth. The making of the contract or terms of service agreement or the issuance of a certificate of authority shall be considered to be the agreement of the foreign corporation or entity that a search warrant or subpoena, which has been properly served on it, has the same legal force and effect as if served personally within the Commonwealth.

"Properly served" means delivery of a search warrant or subpoena by hand, by United States mail, by

commercial delivery service, by facsimile or by any other manner to any officer of a corporation or its general manager in the Commonwealth, to any natural person designated by it as agent for the service of process, or if such corporation has designated a corporate agent, to any person named in the latest annual report filed pursuant to § 13.1-775.