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HOUSE BILL NO. 1900

House Amendments in [] - January 21, 2021

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 55.1-1243.1 and to repeal § 55.1-1243 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; tenant remedies for exclusion from dwelling unit, interruption of services, or actions taken to make premises unsafe.*

Patron Prior to Engrossment—Delegate Hudson

Referred to Committee on General Laws

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 55.1-1243.1 as follows:**

§ 55.1-1243.1. *Tenant's remedies for exclusion from dwelling unit, interruption of services, or actions taken to make premises unsafe.*

A. A general district court shall enter an order pursuant to this section upon petition by a tenant who presents evidence establishing that his landlord has willfully and without authority from the court (i) removed or excluded the tenant from the dwelling unit unlawfully, (ii) interrupted or caused the interruption of an essential service to the tenant, or (iii) taken action to make the premises unsafe for habitation.

B. An order entered pursuant to this section may require the landlord to (i) allow the tenant to recover possession of the dwelling unit, (ii) resume any such interrupted essential service, or (iii) fix any willful actions taken by the landlord or his agent to make the premises unsafe for habitation.

C. ~~[The court shall give petitions filed pursuant to this section priority on its docket and shall make every effort to hold an initial hearing on such petition within five days. The initial hearing on the tenant's petition shall be held within five calendar days from the date of the filing of the petition.]~~ The court may issue a preliminary order ex parte to require the landlord to take action described in subsection B if the court finds (i) there is good cause shown to do so and (ii) the tenant made reasonable efforts to alert the landlord of the hearing. Any preliminary ex parte order issued pursuant to this section shall further include a date of no more than 10 days after the initial hearing for a full hearing to consider the merits of the petition and the damages described in subsection D. At the full hearing, the court may terminate the rental agreement upon request of the tenant and order the landlord to return all of the security deposit in accordance with § 55.1-1226.

D. In a full hearing on a petition filed pursuant to this section [and upon evidence presented establishing one or more of the factors in subsection A], the tenant shall recover (i) the actual damages sustained by him; (ii) statutory damages of \$5,000 or four months' rent, whichever is greater; and (iii) reasonable attorney fees.

2. That § 55.1-1243 of the Code of Virginia is repealed.

ENGROSSED

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