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HOUSE BILL NO. 1744

Offered January 11, 2023

Prefiled January 9, 2023

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 63.2-900, as it is currently effective and as it shall become effective, 63.2-904, and 63.2-1231 of the Code of Virginia, relating to adoption and foster care; home study reciprocity.

 Patron—Carr

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 63.2-900, as it is currently effective and as it shall become effective, 63.2-904, and 63.2-1231 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 63.2-900. (Effective until date pursuant to Va. Const., Art. IV, § 13) Accepting children for placement in homes, facilities, etc., by local boards.

A. Pursuant to § 63.2-319, a local board shall have the right to accept for placement in suitable family homes, children's residential facilities or independent living arrangements, subject to the supervision of the Commissioner and in accordance with regulations adopted by the Board, such persons under 18 years of age as may be entrusted to it by the parent, parents or guardian, committed by any court of competent jurisdiction, or placed through an agreement between it and the parent, parents or guardians where legal custody remains with the parent, parents, or guardians.

The Board shall adopt regulations for the provision of foster care services by local boards, which shall be directed toward the prevention of unnecessary foster care placements and towards the immediate care of and permanent planning for children in the custody of or placed by local boards and that shall achieve, as quickly as practicable, permanent placements for such children. The local board shall first seek out kinship care options to keep children out of foster care and as a placement option for those children in foster care, if it is in the child's best interests, pursuant to § 63.2-900.1. In cases in which a child cannot be returned to his prior family or placed for adoption and kinship care is not currently in the best interests of the child, the local board shall consider the placement and services that afford the best alternative for protecting the child's welfare. Placements may include but are not limited to family foster care, treatment foster care and residential care. Services may include but are not limited to assessment and stabilization, diligent family search, intensive in-home, intensive wraparound, respite, mentoring, family mentoring, adoption support, supported adoption, crisis stabilization or other community-based services. The Board shall also approve in foster care policy the language of the agreement required in § 63.2-902. The agreement shall include at a minimum a Code of Ethics and mutual responsibilities for all parties to the agreement.

Within 30 days of accepting for foster care placement a person under 18 years of age whose father is unknown, the local board shall request a search of the Virginia Birth Father Registry established pursuant to Article 7 (§ 63.2-1249 et seq.) of Chapter 12 to determine whether any man has registered as the putative father of the child. If the search results indicate that a man has registered as the putative father of the child, the local board shall contact the man to begin the process to determine paternity.

The local board shall, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the Board and in accordance with the entrustment agreement or other order by which such person is entrusted or committed to its care, have custody and control of the person so entrusted or committed to it until he is lawfully discharged, has been adopted or has attained his majority.

Whenever a local board places a child where legal custody remains with the parent, parents or guardians, the board shall enter into an agreement with the parent, parents or guardians. The agreement shall specify the responsibilities of each for the care and control of the child.

The local board shall have authority to place for adoption, and to consent to the adoption of, any child properly committed or entrusted to its care when the order of commitment or entrustment agreement between the parent or parents and the agency provides for the termination of all parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the child for the purpose of placing and consenting to the adoption of the child.

The local board shall also have the right to accept temporary custody of any person under 18 years of age taken into custody pursuant to subdivision B of § 16.1-246 or § 63.2-1517. The placement of a child in a foster home, whether within or without the Commonwealth, shall not be for the purpose of adoption unless the placement agreement between the foster parents and the local board specifically so stipulates.

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59 B. Prior to the approval of any family for placement of a child, a home study shall be completed and
60 the prospective foster or adoptive parents shall be informed that information about shaken baby
61 syndrome, its effects, and resources for help and support for caretakers is available on a website
62 maintained by the Department as prescribed in regulations adopted by the Board. Home studies by local
63 boards shall be conducted in accordance with the Mutual Family Assessment home study template and
64 any addenda thereto developed by the Department. *All home studies conducted pursuant to this section,*
65 *whether by a local board or a licensed child-placing agency, shall be transferable between all localities,*
66 *local boards, and licensed child-placing agencies within the Commonwealth, subject to any time*
67 *limitations or other requirements imposed by law or Board regulations.*

68 C. Prior to placing any such child in any foster home or children's residential facility, the local board
69 shall enter into a written agreement with the foster parents, pursuant to § 63.2-902, or other appropriate
70 custodian setting forth therein the conditions under which the child is so placed pursuant to § 63.2-902.
71 However, if a child is placed in a children's residential facility licensed as a temporary emergency
72 shelter, and a verbal agreement for placement is secured within eight hours of the child's arrival at the
73 facility, the written agreement does not need to be entered into prior to placement, but shall be
74 completed and signed by the local board and the facility representative within 24 hours of the child's
75 arrival or by the end of the next business day after the child's arrival.

76 Agreements entered into pursuant to this subsection shall include a statement by the local board that
77 all reasonably ascertainable background, medical, and psychological records of the child, including
78 whether the child has been the subject of an investigation as the perpetrator of sexual abuse, have been
79 provided to the foster home or children's residential facility.

80 D. Within 72 hours of placing a child of school age in a foster care placement, as defined in
81 § 63.2-100, the local social services agency making such placement shall, in writing, (i) notify the
82 principal of the school in which the student is to be enrolled and the superintendent of the relevant
83 school division or his designee of such placement, and (ii) inform the principal of the status of the
84 parental rights.

85 If the documents required for enrollment of the foster child pursuant to § 22.1-3.1, 22.1-270 or
86 22.1-271.2, are not immediately available upon taking the child into custody, the placing social services
87 agency shall obtain and produce or otherwise ensure compliance with such requirements for the foster
88 child within 30 days after the child's enrollment.

89 E. Every local board shall submit to the Department through its statewide automated system the
90 names of all foster parents licensed to provide foster care services in the locality served by the local
91 board and update such list quarterly.

92 **§ 63.2-900. (Effective pursuant to Va. Const., Art. IV, § 13) Accepting children for placement in**
93 **homes, facilities, etc., by local boards.**

94 A. Pursuant to § 63.2-319, a local board shall have the right to accept for placement in suitable
95 family homes, children's residential facilities or independent living arrangements, subject to the
96 supervision of the Commissioner and in accordance with regulations adopted by the Board, such persons
97 under 18 years of age as may be entrusted to it by the parent, parents or guardian, committed by any
98 court of competent jurisdiction, or placed through an agreement between it and the parent, parents or
99 guardians where legal custody remains with the parent, parents, or guardians.

100 The Board shall adopt regulations for the provision of foster care services by local boards, which
101 shall be directed toward the prevention of unnecessary foster care placements and towards the immediate
102 care of and permanent planning for children in the custody of or placed by local boards and that shall
103 achieve, as quickly as practicable, permanent placements for such children. The local board shall first
104 seek out kinship care options to keep children out of foster care and as a placement option for those
105 children in foster care, if it is in the child's best interests, pursuant to § 63.2-900.1. In cases in which a
106 child cannot be returned to his prior family or placed for adoption and kinship care is not currently in
107 the best interests of the child, the local board shall consider the placement and services that afford the
108 best alternative for protecting the child's welfare. Placements may include but are not limited to family
109 foster care, treatment foster care, and residential care; however, the local board shall seek to place the
110 child with a foster family within the locality of the local board or a nearby locality through the
111 collaborative local board placement program set forth in subsection F, provided that such placement is in
112 the best interests of the child. Services may include but are not limited to assessment and stabilization,
113 diligent family search, intensive in-home, intensive wraparound, respite, mentoring, family mentoring,
114 adoption support, supported adoption, crisis stabilization or other community-based services. The Board
115 shall also approve in foster care policy the language of the agreement required in § 63.2-902. The
116 agreement shall include at a minimum a Code of Ethics and mutual responsibilities for all parties to the
117 agreement.

118 Within 30 days of accepting for foster care placement a person under 18 years of age whose father is
119 unknown, the local board shall request a search of the Virginia Birth Father Registry established
120 pursuant to Article 7 (§ 63.2-1249 et seq.) of Chapter 12 to determine whether any man has registered

as the putative father of the child. If the search results indicate that a man has registered as the putative father of the child, the local board shall contact the man to begin the process to determine paternity.

The local board shall, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the Board and in accordance with the entrustment agreement or other order by which such person is entrusted or committed to its care, have custody and control of the person so entrusted or committed to it until he is lawfully discharged, has been adopted or has attained his majority.

Whenever a local board places a child where legal custody remains with the parent, parents or guardians, the board shall enter into an agreement with the parent, parents or guardians. The agreement shall specify the responsibilities of each for the care and control of the child.

The local board shall have authority to place for adoption, and to consent to the adoption of, any child properly committed or entrusted to its care when the order of commitment or entrustment agreement between the parent or parents and the agency provides for the termination of all parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the child for the purpose of placing and consenting to the adoption of the child.

The local board shall also have the right to accept temporary custody of any person under 18 years of age taken into custody pursuant to subdivision B of § 16.1-246 or § 63.2-1517. The placement of a child in a foster home, whether within or without the Commonwealth, shall not be for the purpose of adoption unless the placement agreement between the foster parents and the local board specifically so stipulates.

B. Prior to the approval of any family for placement of a child, a home study shall be completed and the prospective foster or adoptive parents shall be informed that information about shaken baby syndrome, its effects, and resources for help and support for caretakers is available on a website maintained by the Department as prescribed in regulations adopted by the Board. Home studies by local boards shall be conducted in accordance with the Mutual Family Assessment home study template and any addenda thereto developed by the Department. *All home studies conducted pursuant to this section, whether by a local board or a licensed child-placing agency, shall be transferable between all localities, local boards, and licensed child-placing agencies within the Commonwealth, subject to any time limitations or other requirements imposed by law or Board regulations.*

C. Prior to placing any such child in any foster home or children's residential facility, the local board shall enter into a written agreement with the foster parents, pursuant to § 63.2-902, or other appropriate custodian setting forth therein the conditions under which the child is so placed pursuant to § 63.2-902. However, if a child is placed in a children's residential facility licensed as a temporary emergency shelter, and a verbal agreement for placement is secured within eight hours of the child's arrival at the facility, the written agreement does not need to be entered into prior to placement, but shall be completed and signed by the local board and the facility representative within 24 hours of the child's arrival or by the end of the next business day after the child's arrival.

Agreements entered into pursuant to this subsection shall include a statement by the local board that all reasonably ascertainable background, medical, and psychological records of the child, including whether the child has been the subject of an investigation as the perpetrator of sexual abuse, have been provided to the foster home or children's residential facility.

D. Within 72 hours of placing a child of school age in a foster care placement, as defined in § 63.2-100, the local social services agency making such placement shall, in writing, (i) notify the principal of the school in which the student is to be enrolled and the superintendent of the relevant school division or his designee of such placement, and (ii) inform the principal of the status of the parental rights.

If the documents required for enrollment of the foster child pursuant to § 22.1-3.1, 22.1-270 or 22.1-271.2, are not immediately available upon taking the child into custody, the placing social services agency shall obtain and produce or otherwise ensure compliance with such requirements for the foster child within 30 days after the child's enrollment.

E. Every local board shall submit to the Department through its statewide automated system the names of all foster parents licensed to provide foster care services in the locality served by the local board and update such list quarterly.

F. The Department shall establish and implement a collaborative local board placement program to increase kinship placements and the number of locally approved foster homes. Such program shall require local boards within each Department of Social Services region to work collaboratively to (i) facilitate approval of kinship foster parents through engagement, assessment, and training and (ii) expand the pool of available foster homes within and across the localities of such local boards.

§ 63.2-904. Investigation, visitation, and supervision of foster homes or independent living arrangement; removal of child.

A. Before placing or arranging for the placement of any such child in a foster home or independent living arrangement, a local board or licensed child-placing agency shall cause a careful study to be made

182 to determine the suitability of such home or independent living arrangement, and after placement shall
183 cause such home or independent living arrangement and child to be visited as often as necessary to
184 protect the interests of such child. Home studies by local boards shall be conducted in accordance with
185 the Mutual Family Assessment home study template and any addenda thereto developed by the
186 Department. *All home studies conducted pursuant to this section, whether by a local board or a licensed*
187 *child-placing agency, shall be transferable between all localities, local boards, and licensed*
188 *child-placing agencies within the Commonwealth, subject to any time limitations or other requirements*
189 *imposed by law or Board regulations.*

190 B. Every local board or licensed child-placing agency that places a child in a foster home or
191 independent living arrangement shall maintain such supervision over such home or independent living
192 arrangement as shall be required by the standards and policies established by the Board.

193 C. Whenever any child placed by a local board or licensed child-placing agency and still under its
194 control or supervision is subject, in the home in which he is placed, to unwholesome influences or to
195 neglect or mistreatment, or whenever the Commissioner shall so order, such local board or agency shall
196 cause the child to be removed from such home and shall make for him such arrangements as may be
197 approved by the Commissioner. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Commissioner shall
198 have the authority to place, remove, or direct the placement or removal of any child who is under the
199 supervision and control of a local board or licensed child-placing agency. Pursuant to such authority, the
200 Commissioner shall remove or direct the removal of any child placed by a local board or licensed
201 child-placing agency in a foster home or children's residential facility that fails to comply with any state
202 or federal requirements intended to protect the child's health, safety, or well-being.

203 D. Consistent with the reasonable and prudent parent standard defined in 42 U.S.C. § 675(10)(A),
204 caregivers for children in foster care shall support normalcy for such children. The Board shall adopt
205 regulations to assist local boards and licensed child-placing agencies in carrying out practices that
206 support careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interest of the
207 child while at the same time encouraging his emotional and developmental growth.

208 **§ 63.2-1231. Home study; meeting required; exception.**

209 A. Prior to the consent hearing in the juvenile and domestic relations district court, a home study of
210 the adoptive parent(s) shall be completed by a licensed or duly authorized child-placing agency and the
211 prospective adoptive parents shall be informed that information about shaken baby syndrome, its effects,
212 and resources for help and support for caretakers is available on a website maintained by the
213 Department in accordance with regulations adopted by the Board. Home studies by local boards shall be
214 conducted in accordance with the Mutual Family Assessment home study template and any addenda
215 thereto developed by the Department. All home studies conducted pursuant to this section, whether by a
216 local board or a child-placing agency, shall make inquiry as to (i) whether the prospective adoptive
217 parents are financially able, morally suitable, and in satisfactory physical and mental health to enable
218 them to care for the child; (ii) the physical and mental condition of the child, if known; (iii) the
219 circumstances under which the child came to live, or will be living, in the home of the prospective
220 adoptive family, as applicable; (iv) what fees have been paid by the prospective adoptive family or in
221 their behalf in the placement and adoption of the child; (v) whether the requirements of subdivisions A
222 1, A 2, A 3, and A 5 of § 63.2-1232 have been met; and (vi) any other matters specified by the circuit
223 court. In the course of the home study, the agency social worker, family-services specialist, or other
224 qualified equivalent worker shall meet at least once with the birth parent(s) and at least once with the
225 prospective adoptive parents. Upon agreement of both parties, such meetings may occur simultaneously
226 or separately.

227 *All home studies conducted pursuant to this section, whether by a local board or a licensed*
228 *child-placing agency, shall be transferable between all localities, local boards, and licensed*
229 *child-placing agencies within the Commonwealth, subject to the time limitations set forth in subsection B*
230 *and any other requirements established by Board regulations.*

231 B. Any home study conducted pursuant to this section for the purpose of parental placement or
232 agency placement shall be valid for a period of 36 months from the date of completion of the study.
233 However, the Board may, by regulation, require an additional state criminal background check before
234 finalizing an adoption if more than 18 months have passed from the completion of the home study.

235 **2. That the provisions of the first enactment of this act shall become effective on July 1, 2024.**

236 **3. That the State Board of Social Services may promulgate regulations that establish a market rate**
237 **for home studies conducted by local boards of social services or licensed child-placing agencies for**
238 **the purpose of foster care, independent living arrangements, or adoption placements.**

239 **4. That the Department of Social Services (the Department) shall convene a work group to study**
240 **and create, in coordination with all relevant stakeholders, a template to be used for all home**
241 **studies conducted by local boards of social services or licensed child-placing agencies for the**
242 **purpose of foster care, independent living arrangements, or adoption placements. The Department**
243 **shall report its findings to the Chairmen of the House Committee on Health, Welfare and**

244 Institutions and the Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services by November 1, 2023.

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