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HOUSE BILL NO. 2501

Offered January 20, 1997

A BILL to amend and reenact § 38.2-2206 of the Code of Virginia, relating to uninsured motorist insurance coverage; exception to immunity from liability.

Patrons—Forbes, Armstrong, Deeds, Howell, McDonnell and Mims; Senators: Benedetti, Edwards and Gartlan

Referred to Committee on Corporations, Insurance and Banking

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 38.2-2206 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 38.2-2206. Uninsured motorist insurance coverage.

A. Except as provided in subsection J of this section, no policy or contract of bodily injury or property damage liability insurance relating to the ownership, maintenance, or use of a motor vehicle shall be issued or delivered in this Commonwealth to the owner of such vehicle or shall be issued or delivered by any insurer licensed in this Commonwealth upon any motor vehicle principally garaged or used in this Commonwealth unless it contains an endorsement or provisions undertaking to pay the insured all sums that he is legally entitled to recover as damages from the owner or operator of an uninsured motor vehicle, within limits not less than the requirements of § 46.2-472. Those limits shall equal but not exceed the limits of the liability insurance provided by the policy, unless any one named insured rejects the additional uninsured motorist insurance coverage by notifying the insurer as provided in subsection B of § 38.2-2202. This rejection of the additional uninsured motorist insurance coverage by any one named insured shall be binding upon all insureds under such policy as defined in subsection B of this section. The endorsement or provisions shall also obligate the insurer to make payment for bodily injury or property damage caused by the operation or use of an underinsured motor vehicle to the extent the vehicle is underinsured, as defined in subsection B of this section. The endorsement or provisions shall also provide for at least \$20,000 coverage for damage or destruction of the property of the insured in any one accident but may provide an exclusion of the first \$200 of the loss or damage where the loss or damage is a result of any one accident involving an unidentifiable owner or operator of an uninsured motor vehicle.

B. As used in this section, the term "bodily injury" includes death resulting from bodily injury.

"Insured" as used in subsections A, D, G, and H of this section means the named insured and, while resident of the same household, the spouse of the named insured, and relatives, wards or foster children of either, while in a motor vehicle or otherwise, and any person who uses the motor vehicle to which the policy applies, with the expressed or implied consent of the named insured, and a guest in the motor vehicle to which the policy applies or the personal representative of any of the above.

"Uninsured motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle for which (i) there is no bodily injury liability insurance and property damage liability insurance in the amounts specified by § 46.2-472, (ii) there is such insurance but the insurer writing the insurance denies coverage for any reason whatsoever, including failure or refusal of the insured to cooperate with the insurer, (iii) there is no bond or deposit of money or securities in lieu of such insurance, ~~or~~ (iv) the owner of the motor vehicle has not qualified as a self-insurer under the provisions of § 46.2-368, or (v) *the owner or operator of the motor vehicle is immune from liability for negligence under the laws of the Commonwealth or the United States, in which case the provisions of subsection F shall apply and the action shall continue against the insurer.* A motor vehicle shall be deemed uninsured if its owner or operator is unknown.

A motor vehicle is "underinsured" when, and to the extent that, the total amount of bodily injury and property damage coverage applicable to the operation or use of the motor vehicle and available for payment for such bodily injury or property damage, including all bonds or deposits of money or securities made pursuant to Article 15 (§ 46.2-435 et seq.) of Chapter 3 of Title 46.2, is less than the total amount of uninsured motorist coverage afforded any person injured as a result of the operation or use of the vehicle.

"Available for payment" means the amount of liability insurance coverage applicable to the claim of the injured person for bodily injury or property damage reduced by the payment of any other claims arising out of the same occurrence.

If an injured person is entitled to underinsured motorist coverage under more than one policy, the following order of priority of policies applies and any amount available for payment shall be credited against such policies in the following order of priority:

1. The policy covering a motor vehicle occupied by the injured person at the time of the accident;

INTRODUCED

HB2501

60 2. The policy covering a motor vehicle not involved in the accident under which the injured person
61 is a named insured;

62 3. The policy covering a motor vehicle not involved in the accident under which the injured person
63 is an insured other than a named insured.

64 Where there is more than one insurer providing coverage under one of the payment priorities set
65 forth, their liability shall be proportioned as to their respective underinsured motorist coverages.

66 Recovery under the endorsement or provisions shall be subject to the conditions set forth in this
67 section.

68 C. There shall be a rebuttable presumption that a motor vehicle is uninsured if the Commissioner of
69 the Department of Motor Vehicles certifies that, from the records of the Department of Motor Vehicles,
70 it appears that: (i) there is no bodily injury liability insurance and property damage liability insurance in
71 the amounts specified by § 46.2-472 covering the owner or operator of the motor vehicle; or (ii) no
72 bond has been given or cash or securities delivered in lieu of the insurance; or (iii) the owner or
73 operator of the motor vehicle has not qualified as a self-insurer in accordance with the provisions of
74 § 46.2-368.

75 D. If the owner or operator of any motor vehicle that causes bodily injury or property damage to the
76 insured is unknown, and if the damage or injury results from an accident where there has been no
77 contact between that motor vehicle and the motor vehicle occupied by the insured, or where there has
78 been no contact with the person of the insured if the insured was not occupying a motor vehicle, then
79 for the insured to recover under the endorsement required by subsection A of this section, the accident
80 shall be reported promptly to either (i) the insurer or (ii) a law-enforcement officer having jurisdiction in
81 the county or city in which the accident occurred. If it is not reasonably practicable to make the report
82 promptly, the report shall be made as soon as reasonably practicable under the circumstances.

83 E. If the owner or operator of any vehicle causing injury or damages is unknown, an action may be
84 instituted against the unknown defendant as "John Doe" and service of process may be made by
85 delivering a copy of the motion for judgment or other pleadings to the clerk of the court in which the
86 action is brought. Service upon the insurer issuing the policy shall be made as prescribed by law as
87 though the insurer were a party defendant. The provisions of § 8.01-288 shall not be applicable to the
88 service of process required in this subsection. The insurer shall have the right to file pleadings and take
89 other action allowable by law in the name of John Doe.

90 F. If any action is instituted against the owner or operator of an uninsured or underinsured motor
91 vehicle by any insured intending to rely on the uninsured or underinsured coverage provision or
92 endorsement of this policy under which the insured is making a claim, then the insured shall serve a
93 copy of the process upon this insurer in the manner prescribed by law, as though the insurer were a
94 party defendant. The provisions of § 8.01-288 shall not be applicable to the service of process required
95 in this subsection. The insurer shall then have the right to file pleadings and take other action allowable
96 by law in the name of the owner or operator of the uninsured or underinsured motor vehicle or in its
97 own name. *Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection A, the immunity from liability for negligence of*
98 *the owner or operator of a motor vehicle shall not be a bar to the insured obtaining a judgment*
99 *enforceable against the insurer for the negligence of the immune owner or operator, and shall not be a*
100 *defense to the action available to the insurer, which shall proceed against the named defendant although*
101 *any judgment obtained would be enforceable against the insurer and any other non-immune defendant.*
102 Nothing in this subsection shall prevent the owner or operator of the uninsured motor vehicle from
103 employing counsel of his own choice and taking any action in his own interest in connection with the
104 proceeding.

105 G. Any insurer paying a claim under the endorsement or provisions required by subsection A of this
106 section shall be subrogated to the rights of the insured to whom the claim was paid against the person
107 causing the injury, death, or damage and that person's insurer, although it may deny coverage for any
108 reason, to the extent that payment was made. The bringing of an action against the unknown owner or
109 operator as John Doe or the conclusion of such an action shall not bar the insured from bringing an
110 action against the owner or operator proceeded against as John Doe, or against the owner's or operator's
111 insurer denying coverage for any reason, if the identity of the owner or operator who caused the injury
112 or damages becomes known. Any recovery against the owner or operator, or the insurer of the owner or
113 operator shall be paid to the insurer of the injured party to the extent that the insurer paid the named
114 insured in the action brought against the owner or operator as John Doe. However, the insurer shall pay
115 its proportionate part of all reasonable costs and expenses incurred in connection with the action,
116 including reasonable attorney's fees. Nothing in an endorsement or provisions made under this subsection
117 nor any other provision of law shall prevent the joining in an action against John Doe of the owner or
118 operator of the motor vehicle causing the injury as a party defendant, and the joinder is hereby
119 specifically authorized.

120 H. No endorsement or provisions providing the coverage required by subsection A of this section
121 shall require arbitration of any claim arising under the endorsement or provisions, nor may anything be

122 required of the insured except the establishment of legal liability, nor shall the insured be restricted or
123 prevented in any manner from employing legal counsel or instituting legal proceedings.

124 I. Except as provided in § 65.2-309.1, the provisions of subsections A and B of § 38.2-2204 and the
125 provisions of subsection A of this section shall not apply to any policy of insurance to the extent that it
126 covers the liability of an employer under any workers' compensation law, or to the extent that it covers
127 liability to which the Federal Tort Claims Act applies. No provision or application of this section shall
128 limit the liability of an insurer of motor vehicles to an employee or other insured under this section who
129 is injured by an uninsured motor vehicle; provided that in the event an employee of a self-insured
130 employer receives a workers' compensation award for injuries resulting from an accident with an
131 uninsured motor vehicle, such award shall be set off against any judgment for damages awarded
132 pursuant to this section for personal injuries resulting from such accident.

133 J. Policies of insurance whose primary purpose is to provide coverage in excess of other valid and
134 collectible insurance or qualified self-insurance may include uninsured motorist coverage as provided in
135 subsection A of this section. Insurers issuing or providing liability policies that are of an excess or
136 umbrella type or which provide liability coverage incidental to a policy and not related to a specifically
137 insured motor vehicle, shall not be required to offer, provide or make available to those policies
138 uninsured or underinsured motor vehicle coverage as defined in subsection A of this section.

139 K. A liability insurance carrier providing coverage under a policy issued or renewed on or after July
140 1, 1988, may pay the entire amount of its available coverage without obtaining a release of a claim if
141 the claimant has underinsured insurance coverage in excess of the amount so paid. Any liability insurer
142 making a payment pursuant to this section shall promptly give notice to its insured and to the insurer
143 which provides the underinsured coverage that it has paid the full amount of its available coverage.