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HOUSE BILL NO. 1061**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**(Proposed by the House Committee for Courts of Justice
on February 8, 2002)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Moran)

*A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 16.1-281 and 16.1-283 of the Code of Virginia, relating to foster care plans; termination of parental rights.***Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That §§ 16.1-281 and 16.1-283 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 16.1-281. Foster care plan.

A. In any case in which (i) a local board of social services or a public agency designated by the community policy and management team places a child through an agreement with the parents or guardians where legal custody remains with the parents or guardian, or (ii) legal custody of a child is given to a local board of public welfare or social services or a child welfare agency, the department of public welfare or social services, the public agency designated or child welfare agency or the family assessment and planning team established pursuant to § 2.2-5207 shall prepare a foster care plan for such child, as described hereinafter. The individual family service plan developed by the family assessment and planning team pursuant to § 2.2-5208 may be accepted by the court as the foster care plan if it meets the requirements of this section. The representatives of such department, agency, or team shall consult with the child's parents, except when parental rights have been terminated, and any other person or persons standing in loco parentis at the time the board or child welfare agency obtained custody or the board or the public agency placed the child, concerning the matters which should be included in such plan. The department, public agency, child welfare agency or team shall file the plan with the juvenile and domestic relations district court within sixty days following the transfer of custody or the board's or public agency's placement of the child unless the court, for good cause shown, allows an extension of time, which shall not exceed an additional sixty days. However, a foster care plan shall be filed in accordance with the provisions of § 16.1-277.01 with a petition for approval of an entrustment agreement. A foster care plan need not be prepared if the child is returned to his prior family or placed in an adoptive home within sixty days following transfer of custody to the board or agency or the board's or public agency's placement of the child.

B. The foster care plan shall describe (i) the programs, care, services and other support which will be offered to the child and his parents and other prior custodians; (ii) the participation and conduct which will be sought from the child's parents and other prior custodians; (iii) the visitation and other contacts which will be permitted between the child and his parents and other prior custodians; (iv) the nature of the placement or placements which will be provided for the child; and (v) in writing and where appropriate for children age sixteen or over, the programs and services which will help the child prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living. If consistent with the child's health and safety, the plan shall be designed to support reasonable efforts which lead to the return of the child to his parents or other prior custodians within the shortest practicable time which shall be specified in the plan. The child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern of the court and the agency throughout the placement, case planning, service provision and review process.

If the department, child welfare agency or team determines that it is not reasonably likely that the child can be returned to his prior family within a practicable time, consistent with the best interests of the child, in a separate section of the plan the department, child welfare agency or team shall (i) include a full description of the reasons for this conclusion; (ii) determine the opportunities for placing the child with a relative or in an adoptive home; (iii) design the plan to lead to the child's successful placement with a relative if a subsequent transfer of custody to the relative is planned, or in an adoptive home within the shortest practicable time, and if neither of such placements is feasible; (iv) explain why independent living for a child sixteen years of age or older, permanent foster care or continued foster care is the plan for the child. "Independent living" includes the services and programs needed to assist the child in making a transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. The department or agency may include with such proposed plan a proper pleading seeking the termination of residual parental rights pursuant to § 16.1-283.

The local board or other child welfare agency having custody of the child shall not be required by the court to make reasonable efforts to reunite the child with a parent if the court finds that (i) the residual parental rights of the parent regarding a sibling of the child have previously been involuntarily terminated; (ii) the parent has been convicted of an offense under the laws of this Commonwealth or a substantially similar law of any other state, the United States or any foreign jurisdiction which that constitutes murder or voluntary manslaughter, or a felony attempt, conspiracy or solicitation to commit

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60 any such offense, if the victim of the offense was a child of the parent, a child with whom the parent
61 resided at the time such offense occurred or the other parent of the child; ~~or~~ (iii) the parent has been
62 convicted of an offense under the laws of this Commonwealth or a substantially similar law of any other
63 state, the United States or any foreign jurisdiction ~~which~~ *that* constitutes felony assault resulting in
64 serious bodily injury or felony bodily wounding resulting in serious bodily injury or felony sexual
65 assault, if the victim of the offense was a child of the parent or a child with whom the parent resided at
66 the time of such offense; *or (iv) based on clear and convincing evidence, the parent has subjected any*
67 *child to aggravated circumstances, or abandoned a child under circumstances which would justify the*
68 *termination of residual parental rights pursuant to subsection D of § 16.1-283.*

69 As used in this section:

70 "~~serious~~"*Serious* bodily injury" means bodily injury which involves substantial risk of death, extreme
71 physical pain, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of
72 a bodily member, organ or mental faculty.

73 "*Aggravated circumstances*" means torture, chronic or severe abuse, or chronic or severe sexual
74 abuse, if the victim of such conduct was a child of the parent or child with whom the parent resided at
75 the time such conduct occurred, including the failure to protect such a child from such conduct, which
76 conduct or failure to protect: (i) evinces a wanton or depraved indifference to human life, or (ii) has
77 resulted in the death of such a child or in serious bodily injury to such a child.

78 "*Severe abuse*" or "*severe sexual abuse*" may include an act or omission that occurred only once,
79 but otherwise meets the definition of "*aggravated circumstances*."

80 "*Chronic abuse*" or "*chronic sexual abuse*" means recurring acts of physical abuse that place the
81 child's health, safety and well-being at risk. Within thirty days of making a determination that
82 reasonable efforts to reunite the child with the parents are not required, the court shall hold a
83 permanency planning hearing pursuant to § 16.1-282.1.

84 C. A copy of the entire foster care plan shall be sent by the court to the child, if he is twelve years
85 of age or older; the guardian ad litem for the child, the attorney for the child's parents or for any other
86 person standing in loco parentis at the time the board or child welfare agency obtained custody or the
87 board or public agency placed the child, to the parents or other person standing in loco parentis, and
88 such other persons as appear to the court to have a proper interest in the plan. However, a copy of the
89 plan shall not be sent to a parent whose parental rights regarding the child have been terminated. A
90 copy of the plan, excluding the section of the plan describing the reasons why the child cannot be
91 returned home and the alternative chosen, shall be sent by the court to the foster parents. A hearing
92 shall be held for the purpose of reviewing and approving the foster care plan. The hearing shall be held
93 within seventy-five days of (i) the child's initial foster care placement, if the child was placed through
94 an agreement between the parents or guardians and the local department of social services, other public
95 agency or a child welfare agency; (ii) the original preliminary removal order hearing, if the child was
96 placed in foster care pursuant to § 16.1-252; (iii) the hearing on the petition for relief of custody, if the
97 child was placed in foster care pursuant to § 16.1-277.02; or (iv) the dispositional hearing at which the
98 child was placed in foster care and an order was entered pursuant to §§ 16.1-278.2, 16.1-278.3,
99 16.1-278.4, 16.1-278.5, 16.1-278.6 or § 16.1-278.8. However, the hearing shall be held in accordance
100 with the provisions of § 16.1-277.01 with a petition for approval of an entrustment agreement. If the
101 judge makes any revision in any part of the foster care plan, a copy of the changes shall be sent by the
102 court to all persons who received a copy of the original of that part of the plan.

103 C1. Any order transferring custody of the child to a relative other than the child's prior family shall
104 be entered only upon a finding, based upon a preponderance of the evidence, that the relative is one
105 who, after an investigation as directed by the court, (i) is found by the court to be willing and qualified
106 to receive and care for the child; (ii) is willing to have a positive, continuous relationship with the child;
107 (iii) is committed to providing a permanent, suitable home for the child; and (iv) is willing and has the
108 ability to protect the child from abuse and neglect; and the order shall so state. The court's order
109 transferring custody to a relative should further provide for, as appropriate, any terms or conditions
110 which would promote the child's interest and welfare; ongoing provision of social services to the child
111 and the child's custodian; and court review of the child's placement.

112 D. The court in which the foster care plan is filed shall be notified immediately if the child is
113 returned to his parents or other persons standing in loco parentis at the time the board or agency
114 obtained custody or the board or public agency placed the child.

115 E. Nothing in this section shall limit the authority of the juvenile judge or the staff of the juvenile
116 court, upon order of the judge, to review the status of children in the custody of local boards of public
117 welfare or social services or placed by local boards of social services or the public agency designated by
118 the community policy and management team on its own motion. The court shall appoint an attorney to
119 act as guardian ad litem to represent the child any time a hearing is held to review the foster care plan
120 filed for the child or to review the child's status in foster care.

121 F. At the conclusion of the hearing at which the foster care plan is reviewed, the court shall schedule

122 a foster care review hearing to be held within six months in accordance with § 16.1-282. Parties who are
123 present at the hearing pursuant to this section shall be given notice of the date set for the foster care
124 review hearing and parties who are not present shall be summoned as provided in § 16.1-263.

125 § 16.1-283. Termination of residual parental rights.

126 A. The residual parental rights of a parent or parents may be terminated by the court as hereinafter
127 provided in a separate proceeding if the petition specifically requests such relief. No petition seeking
128 termination of residual parental rights shall be accepted by the court prior to the filing of a foster care
129 plan, pursuant to § 16.1-281, which documents termination of residual parental rights as being in the
130 best interests of the child. The court may hear and adjudicate a petition for termination of parental rights
131 in the same proceeding in which the court has approved a foster care plan which documents that
132 termination is in the best interests of the child. The court may terminate the residual parental rights of
133 one parent without affecting the rights of the other parent. The local board of social services or a
134 licensed child-placing agency need not have identified an available and eligible family to adopt a child
135 for whom termination of parental rights is being sought prior to the entry of an order terminating
136 parental rights.

137 Any order terminating residual parental rights shall be accompanied by an order continuing or
138 granting custody to a local board of social services, to a licensed child-placing agency or the granting of
139 custody or guardianship to a relative or other interested individual, subject to the provisions of
140 subsection A1 of this section. However, in such cases the court shall give a consideration to granting
141 custody to relatives of the child, including grandparents. An order continuing or granting custody to a
142 local board of social services or to a licensed child-placing agency shall indicate whether that board or
143 agency shall have the authority to place the child for adoption and consent thereto.

144 The summons shall be served upon the parent or parents and the other parties specified in
145 § 16.1-263. Written notice of the hearing shall also be provided to the foster parents of the child, a
146 relative providing care for the child, and any preadoptive parents for the child informing them that they
147 may appear as witnesses at the hearing to give testimony and otherwise participate in the proceeding.
148 The persons entitled to notice and an opportunity to be heard need not be made parties to the
149 proceedings. The summons or notice of hearing shall clearly state the consequences of a termination of
150 residual parental rights. Service shall be made pursuant to § 16.1-264.

151 A1. Any order transferring custody of the child to a relative or other interested individual pursuant to
152 subsection A of this section shall be entered only upon a finding, based upon a preponderance of the
153 evidence, that the relative or other interested individual is one who, after an investigation as directed by
154 the court, (i) is found by the court to be willing and qualified to receive and care for the child; (ii) is
155 willing to have a positive, continuous relationship with the child; (iii) is committed to providing a
156 permanent, suitable home for the child; and (iv) is willing and has the ability to protect the child from
157 abuse and neglect; and the order shall so state. The court's order transferring custody to a relative or
158 other interested individual should further provide, as appropriate, for any terms and conditions which
159 would promote the child's interest and welfare.

160 B. The residual parental rights of a parent or parents of a child found by the court to be neglected or
161 abused and placed in foster care as a result of (i) court commitment; (ii) an entrustment agreement
162 entered into by the parent or parents; or (iii) other voluntary relinquishment by the parent or parents
163 may be terminated if the court finds, based upon clear and convincing evidence, that it is in the best
164 interests of the child and that:

165 1. The neglect or abuse suffered by such child presented a serious and substantial threat to his life,
166 health or development; and

167 2. It is not reasonably likely that the conditions which resulted in such neglect or abuse can be
168 substantially corrected or eliminated so as to allow the child's safe return to his parent or parents within
169 a reasonable period of time. In making this determination, the court shall take into consideration the
170 efforts made to rehabilitate the parent or parents by any public or private social, medical, mental health
171 or other rehabilitative agencies prior to the child's initial placement in foster care.

172 Proof of any of the following shall constitute prima facie evidence of the conditions set forth in
173 subdivision B 2 hereof:

174 a. The parent or parents are suffering from a mental or emotional illness or mental deficiency of such
175 severity that there is no reasonable expectation that such parent will be able to undertake responsibility
176 for the care needed by the child in accordance with his age and stage of development;

177 b. The parent or parents have habitually abused or are addicted to intoxicating liquors, narcotics or
178 other dangerous drugs to the extent that proper parental ability has been seriously impaired and the
179 parent, without good cause, has not responded to or followed through with recommended and available
180 treatment which could have improved the capacity for adequate parental functioning; or

181 c. The parent or parents, without good cause, have not responded to or followed through with
182 appropriate, available and reasonable rehabilitative efforts on the part of social, medical, mental health or

183 other rehabilitative agencies designed to reduce, eliminate or prevent the neglect or abuse of the child.

184 C. The residual parental rights of a parent or parents of a child placed in foster care as a result of
185 court commitment, an entrustment agreement entered into by the parent or parents or other voluntary
186 relinquishment by the parent or parents may be terminated if the court finds, based upon clear and
187 convincing evidence, that it is in the best interests of the child and that:

188 1. The parent or parents have, without good cause, failed to maintain continuing contact with and to
189 provide or substantially plan for the future of the child for a period of six months after the child's
190 placement in foster care notwithstanding the reasonable and appropriate efforts of social, medical, mental
191 health or other rehabilitative agencies to communicate with the parent or parents and to strengthen the
192 parent-child relationship. Proof that the parent or parents have failed without good cause to communicate
193 on a continuing and planned basis with the child for a period of six months shall constitute prima facie
194 evidence of this condition; or

195 2. The parent or parents, without good cause, have been unwilling or unable within a reasonable
196 period of time not to exceed twelve months from the date the child was placed in foster care to remedy
197 substantially the conditions which led to or required continuation of the child's foster care placement,
198 notwithstanding the reasonable and appropriate efforts of social, medical, mental health or other
199 rehabilitative agencies to such end. Proof that the parent or parents, without good cause, have failed or
200 been unable to make substantial progress towards elimination of the conditions which led to or required
201 continuation of the child's foster care placement in accordance with their obligations under and within
202 the time limits or goals set forth in a foster care plan filed with the court or any other plan jointly
203 designed and agreed to by the parent or parents and a public or private social, medical, mental health or
204 other rehabilitative agency shall constitute prima facie evidence of this condition. The court shall take
205 into consideration the prior efforts of such agencies to rehabilitate the parent or parents prior to the
206 placement of the child in foster care.

207 D. The residual parental rights of a parent or parents of a child found by the court to be neglected or
208 abused upon the ground of abandonment may be terminated if the court finds, based upon clear and
209 convincing evidence, that it is in the best interests of the child and that:

210 1. The child was abandoned under such circumstances that either the identity or the whereabouts of
211 the parent or parents cannot be determined; and

212 2. The child's parent or parents, guardian or relatives have not come forward to identify such child
213 and claim a relationship to the child within three months following the issuance of an order by the court
214 placing the child in foster care; and

215 3. Diligent efforts have been made to locate the child's parent or parents without avail.

216 E. The residual parental rights of a parent or parents of a child who is in the custody of a local
217 board or licensed child-placing agency may be terminated by the court if the court finds, based upon
218 clear and convincing evidence, that it is in the best interests of the child and that (i) the residual
219 parental rights of the parent regarding a sibling of the child have previously been involuntarily
220 terminated; (ii) the parent has been convicted of an offense under the laws of this Commonwealth or a
221 substantially similar law of any other state, the United States or any foreign jurisdiction ~~which~~ *that*
222 constitutes murder or voluntary manslaughter, or a felony attempt, conspiracy or solicitation to commit
223 any such offense, if the victim of the offense was a child of the parent, a child with whom the parent
224 resided at the time such offense occurred or the other parent of the child; ~~or~~ (iii) the parent has been
225 convicted of an offense under the laws of this Commonwealth or a substantially similar law of any other
226 state, the United States or any foreign jurisdiction ~~which~~ *that* constitutes felony assault resulting in
227 serious bodily injury or felony bodily wounding resulting in serious bodily injury or felony sexual
228 assault, if the victim of the offense was a child of the parent or a child with whom the parent resided at
229 the time of such offense; *or (iv) the parent has subjected any child to aggravated circumstances.*

230 As used in this section,:

231 "~~serious~~" *Serious bodily injury* means bodily injury ~~which~~ *that* involves substantial risk of death,
232 extreme physical pain, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the
233 function of a bodily member, organ or mental faculty.

234 "*Aggravated circumstances*" means torture, chronic or severe abuse, or chronic or severe sexual
235 abuse, if the victim of such conduct was a child of the parent or a child with whom the parent resided
236 at the time such conduct occurred, including the failure to protect such a child from such conduct,
237 which conduct or failure to protect: (i) evinces a wanton or depraved indifference to human life, or (ii)
238 has resulted in the death of such a child or in serious bodily injury to such a child.

239 "*Severe abuse*" or "*severe sexual abuse*" may include an act or omission that occurred only once,
240 but otherwise meets the definition of "*aggravated circumstances*."

241 "*Chronic abuse*" or "*chronic sexual abuse*" means recurring acts of physical abuse which place the
242 child's health, safety and well-being at risk. The local board or other child welfare agency having
243 custody of the child shall not be required by the court to make reasonable efforts to reunite the child
244 with a parent who has been convicted of one of the felonies specified in this subsection *or who has*

245 *been found by the court to have subjected any child to aggravated circumstances.*

246 F. The local board or licensed child-placing agency to which authority is given to place the child for
247 adoption and consent thereto after an order terminating parental rights is entered shall file a written
248 Adoption Progress Report with the juvenile court on the progress being made to place the child in an
249 adoptive home. The report shall be filed with the court every six months from the date of the final order
250 terminating parental rights until a final order of adoption is entered on behalf of the child in the circuit
251 court. At the conclusion of the hearing at which termination of parental rights is ordered and authority is
252 given to the local board or licensed child-placing agency to place the child for adoption, the juvenile
253 court shall schedule a date by which the board or agency shall file the first written Adoption Progress
254 Report required by this section. A copy of the Adoption Progress Report shall be sent by the court to
255 the guardian ad litem for the child. The court may schedule a hearing on the report with or without the
256 request of a party.

257 G. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section, residual parental rights shall not be
258 terminated if it is established that the child, if he is fourteen years of age or older or otherwise of an
259 age of discretion as determined by the court, objects to such termination. However, residual parental
260 rights of a child fourteen years of age or older may be terminated over the objection of the child, if the
261 court finds that any disability of the child reduces the child's developmental age and that the child is not
262 otherwise of an age of discretion.