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**HOUSE BILL NO. 2598**

Offered January 10, 2007

Prefiled January 10, 2007

*A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 15.2-853 and 15.2-854 of the Code of Virginia, relating to urban county executive form of government; commission on human rights.*

Patrons—Plum, Bulova, Callahan, Caputo, Ebbin, Hull, Rust, Scott, J.M., Sickles and Watts; Senators: Herring, Howell, Puller and Ticer

Referred to Committee on Counties, Cities and Towns

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

**1. That §§ 15.2-853 and 15.2-854 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 15.2-853. Commission on human rights; human rights ordinance.

A county may enact an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in housing, real estate transactions, employment, public accommodations, credit, and education on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, national origin, age, marital status, *sexual orientation*, or disability. The board may enact an ordinance establishing a local commission on human rights ~~which~~ *that* shall have the following powers and duties:

1. To promote policies to ensure that all persons be afforded equal opportunity;

2. To serve as an agency for receiving, investigating, holding hearings, processing and assisting in the voluntary resolution of complaints regarding discriminatory practices occurring within the county; and

3. With the approval of the county attorney, to seek, through appropriate enforcement authorities, prevention of or relief from a violation of any ordinance prohibiting discrimination and to exercise such other powers and duties as provided in this article. However, the commission shall have no power itself to issue subpoenas, award damages or grant injunctive relief.

For the purposes of this article, "person" means one or more individuals, labor unions, partnerships, corporations, associations, legal representatives, mutual companies, joint-stock companies, trusts or unincorporated organizations.

§ 15.2-854. Investigations.

Whenever the commission on human rights has a reasonable cause to believe that any person has engaged in, or is engaging in, any violation of a county ordinance which prohibits discrimination due to race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, national origin, age, marital status, *sexual orientation*, or disability, and, after making a good faith effort to obtain the data, information, and attendance of witnesses necessary to determine whether such violation has occurred, is unable to obtain such data, information, or attendance, it may request the county attorney to petition the judge of the general district court for its jurisdiction for a subpoena against any such person refusing to produce such data and information or refusing to appear as a witness, and the judge of such court may, upon good cause shown, cause the subpoena to be issued. Any witness subpoena issued under this section shall include a statement that any statements made will be under oath and that the respondent or other witness is entitled to be represented by an attorney. Any person failing to comply with a subpoena issued under this section shall be subject to punishment for contempt by the court issuing the subpoena. Any person so subpoenaed may apply to the judge who issued a subpoena to quash it.

INTRODUCED

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