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**SENATE BILL NO. 917**

Offered January 14, 2015

Prefiled January 8, 2015

*A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 36-96.1 through 36-96.4 and 55-248.47 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Virginia Fair Housing Law; unlawful discriminatory housing practices; sexual orientation and gender identity.*

Patrons—Wexton, Dance, Ebbin and Lewis; Delegates: Sickles and Simon

Referred to Committee on General Laws and Technology

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

**1. That §§ 36-96.1 through 36-96.4 and 55-248.47 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 36-96.1. Declaration of policy.**

A. This chapter shall be known and referred to as the Virginia Fair Housing Law.

B. It is the policy of the Commonwealth of Virginia to provide for fair housing throughout the Commonwealth, to all its citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap, and to that end to prohibit discriminatory practices with respect to residential housing by any person or group of persons, in order that the peace, health, safety, prosperity, and general welfare of all the inhabitants of the Commonwealth may be protected and insured. This law shall be deemed an exercise of the police power of the Commonwealth of Virginia for the protection of the people of the Commonwealth.

**§ 36-96.1:1. Definitions.**

For the purposes of this chapter, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Aggrieved person" means any person who (i) claims to have been injured by a discriminatory housing practice or (ii) believes that such person will be injured by a discriminatory housing practice that is about to occur.

"Complainant" means a person, including the Fair Housing Board, who files a complaint under § 36-96.9.

"Conciliation" means the attempted resolution of issues raised by a complainant, or by the investigation of such complaint, through informal negotiations involving the aggrieved person, the respondent, their respective authorized representatives and the Fair Housing Board.

"Conciliation agreement" means a written agreement setting forth the resolution of the issues in conciliation.

"Discriminatory housing practices" means an act that is unlawful under §§ 36-96.3, 36-96.4, 36-96.5, or § 36-96.6.

"Dwelling" means any building, structure, or portion thereof, that is occupied as, or designated or intended for occupancy as, a residence by one or more families, and any vacant land that is offered for sale or lease for the construction or location thereon of any such building, structure, or portion thereof.

"Elderliness" means an individual who has attained his fifty-fifth birthday.

"Familial status" means one or more individuals who have not attained the age of 18 years being domiciled with (i) a parent or other person having legal custody of such individual or individuals or (ii) the designee of such parent or other person having custody with the written permission of such parent or other person. The term "familial status" also includes any person who is pregnant or is in the process of securing legal custody of any individual who has not attained the age of 18 years. For purposes of this section, "in the process of securing legal custody" means having filed an appropriate petition to obtain legal custody of such minor in a court of competent jurisdiction.

"Family" includes a single individual, whether male or female.

"Gender identity" means the gender-related identity, appearance, or other gender-related characteristics of an individual, with or without regard to the individual's designated sex at birth.

"Handicap" means, with respect to a person, (i) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities; (ii) a record of having such an impairment; or (iii) being regarded as having such an impairment. The term does not include current, illegal use of, or addiction to a controlled substance as defined in Virginia or federal law. Neither the term "individual with handicap" nor the term "handicap" shall apply to an individual solely because that individual is a transvestite.

"Lending institution" includes any bank, savings institution, credit union, insurance company or mortgage lender.

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SB917

59 "Person" means one or more individuals, whether male or female, corporations, partnerships,  
60 associations, labor organizations, fair housing organizations, civil rights organizations, organizations,  
61 governmental entities, legal representatives, mutual companies, joint stock companies, trusts,  
62 unincorporated organizations, trustees, trustees in bankruptcy, receivers and fiduciaries.

63 "Respondent" means any person or other entity alleged to have violated the provisions of this  
64 chapter, as stated in a complaint filed under the provisions of this chapter and any other person joined  
65 pursuant to the provisions of § 36-96.9.

66 "Restrictive covenant" means any specification in any instrument affecting title to real property that  
67 purports to limit the use, occupancy, transfer, rental, or lease of any dwelling because of race, color,  
68 religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, or handicap.

69 "*Sexual orientation*" means a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, bisexuality, or  
70 homosexuality.

71 "To rent" means to lease, to sublease, to let, or otherwise to grant for consideration the right to  
72 occupy premises not owned by the occupant.

73 **§ 36-96.2. Exemptions.**

74 A. Except as provided in subdivision A 3 of § 36-96.3 and subsections A, B, and C of § 36-96.6,  
75 this chapter shall not apply to any single-family house sold or rented by an owner, provided that such  
76 private individual does not own more than three single-family houses at any one time. In the case of the  
77 sale of any single-family house by a private individual-owner not residing in the house at the time of  
78 the sale or who was not the most recent resident of the house prior to sale, the exemption granted shall  
79 apply only with respect to one such sale within any 24-month period; provided that such bona fide  
80 private individual owner does not own any interest in, nor is there owned or reserved on his behalf,  
81 under any express or voluntary agreement, title to or any right to all or a portion of the proceeds from  
82 the sale or rental of, more than three such single-family houses at any one time. The sale or rental of  
83 any such single-family house shall be exempt from the application of this chapter only if the house is  
84 sold or rented (i) without the use in any manner of the sales or rental facilities or the sales or rental  
85 services of any real estate broker, agent, salesperson, or of the facilities or the services of any person in  
86 the business of selling or renting dwellings, or of any employee, independent contractor, or agent of any  
87 broker, agent, salesperson, or person and (ii) without the publication, posting, or mailing, after notice, of  
88 any advertisement or written notice in violation of this chapter. However, nothing herein shall prohibit  
89 the use of attorneys, escrow agents, abstractors, title companies, and other professional assistance as  
90 necessary to perfect or transfer the title. This exemption shall not apply to or inure to the benefit of any  
91 licensee of the Real Estate Board or regulant of the Fair Housing Board, regardless of whether the  
92 licensee is acting in his personal or professional capacity.

93 B. Except for subdivision A 3 of § 36-96.3, this chapter shall not apply to rooms or units in  
94 dwellings containing living quarters occupied or intended to be occupied by no more than four families  
95 living independently of each other, if the owner actually maintains and occupies one of such living  
96 quarters as his residence.

97 C. Nothing in this chapter shall prohibit a religious organization, association or society, or any  
98 nonprofit institution or organization operated, supervised, or controlled by or in conjunction with a  
99 religious organization, association or society, from limiting the sale, rental, or occupancy of dwellings  
100 that it owns or operates for other than a commercial purpose to persons of the same religion, or from  
101 giving preferences to such persons, unless membership in such religion is restricted on account of race,  
102 color, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap.  
103 Nor shall anything in this chapter apply to a private membership club not in fact open to the public,  
104 which as an incident to its primary purpose or purposes provides lodging which it owns or operates for  
105 other than a commercial purpose, from limiting the rental or occupancy of such lodgings to its members  
106 or from giving preference to its members. Nor, where matters of personal privacy are involved, shall  
107 anything in this chapter be construed to prohibit any private, state-owned or state-supported educational  
108 institution, hospital, nursing home, religious or correctional institution, from requiring that persons of  
109 both sexes not occupy any single-family residence or room or unit of dwellings or other buildings, or  
110 restrooms in such room or unit in dwellings or other buildings, which it owns or operates.

111 D. Nothing in this chapter prohibits conduct against a person because such person has been convicted  
112 by any court of competent jurisdiction of the illegal manufacture or distribution of a controlled  
113 substance as defined in federal law.

114 E. It shall not be unlawful under this chapter for any owner to deny or limit the rental of housing to  
115 persons who pose a clear and present threat of substantial harm to others or to the dwelling itself.

116 F. A rental application may require disclosure by the applicant of any criminal convictions and the  
117 owner or managing agent may require as a condition of acceptance of the rental application that  
118 applicant consent in writing to a criminal record check to verify the disclosures made by applicant in the  
119 rental application. The owner or managing agent may collect from the applicant moneys to reimburse  
120 the owner or managing agent for the exact amount of the out-of-pocket costs for such criminal record

checks. Nothing in this chapter shall require an owner or managing agent to rent a dwelling to an individual who, based on a prior record of criminal convictions involving harm to persons or property, would constitute a clear and present threat to the health or safety of other individuals.

G. Nothing in this chapter limits the applicability of any reasonable local, state or federal restriction regarding the maximum number of occupants permitted to occupy a dwelling. Owners or managing agents of dwellings may develop and implement reasonable occupancy and safety standards based on factors such as the number and size of sleeping areas or bedrooms and overall size of a dwelling unit so long as the standards do not violate local, state or federal restrictions. Nothing in this chapter prohibits the rental application or similar document from requiring information concerning the number, ages, sex and familial relationship of the applicants and the dwelling's intended occupants.

**§ 36-96.3. Unlawful discriminatory housing practices.**

A. It shall be an unlawful discriminatory housing practice for any person:

1. To refuse to sell or rent after the making of a bona fide offer or to refuse to negotiate for the sale or rental of, or otherwise make unavailable or deny, a dwelling to any person because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, ~~or~~ familial status, *sexual orientation*, or *gender identity*;

2. To discriminate against any person in the terms, conditions, or privileges of sale or rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or facilities in the connection therewith to any person because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, ~~or~~ familial status, *sexual orientation*, or *gender identity*;

3. To make, print, or publish, or cause to be made, printed, or published any notice, statement, or advertisement, with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination or an intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap. The use of words or symbols associated with a particular religion, national origin, sex, or race shall be prima facie evidence of an illegal preference under this chapter which shall not be overcome by a general disclaimer. However, reference alone to places of worship including, but not limited to, churches, synagogues, temples, or mosques in any such notice, statement or advertisement shall not be prima facie evidence of an illegal preference;

4. To represent to any person because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap that any dwelling is not available for inspection, sale, or rental when such dwelling is in fact so available;

5. To deny any person access to membership in or participation in any multiple listing service, real estate brokers' organization, or other service, organization or facility relating to the business of selling or renting dwellings, or to discriminate against such person in the terms or conditions of such access, membership, or participation because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap;

6. To include in any transfer, sale, rental, or lease of housing, any restrictive covenant that discriminates because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap or for any person to honor or exercise, or attempt to honor or exercise any such discriminatory covenant pertaining to housing;

7. To induce or attempt to induce to sell or rent any dwelling by representations regarding the entry or prospective entry into the neighborhood of a person or persons of a particular race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap;

8. To refuse to sell or rent, or refuse to negotiate for the sale or rental of, or otherwise discriminate or make unavailable or deny a dwelling because of a handicap of (i) the buyer or renter, (ii) a person residing in or intending to reside in that dwelling after it is so sold, rented or made available, or (iii) any person associated with the buyer or renter; *or*

9. To discriminate against any person in the terms, conditions, or privileges of sale or rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or facilities in connection therewith because of a handicap of (i) that person, (ii) a person residing in or intending to reside in that dwelling after it was so sold, rented or made available, or (iii) any person associated with that buyer or renter.

B. For the purposes of this section, discrimination includes: (i) a refusal to permit, at the expense of the handicapped person, reasonable modifications of existing premises occupied or to be occupied by any person if such modifications may be necessary to afford such person full enjoyment of the premises; except that, in the case of a rental, the landlord may, where it is reasonable to do so, condition permission for a modification on the renter's agreeing to restore the interior of the premises to the condition that existed before the modification, reasonable wear and tear excepted; (ii) a refusal to make reasonable accommodations in rules, practices, policies, or services when such accommodations may be necessary to afford such person equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling; or (iii) in connection with the design and construction of covered multi-family dwellings for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, a failure to design and construct dwellings in such a manner that:

182 1. The public use and common use areas of the dwellings are readily accessible to and usable by  
183 handicapped persons;

184 2. All the doors designed to allow passage into and within all premises are sufficiently wide to allow  
185 passage by handicapped persons in wheelchairs; and

186 3. All premises within covered multi-family dwelling units contain an accessible route into and  
187 through the dwelling; light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental controls are  
188 in accessible locations; there are reinforcements in the bathroom walls to allow later installation of grab  
189 bars; and there are usable kitchens and bathrooms such that an individual in a wheelchair can maneuver  
190 about the space. As used in this subdivision the term "covered multi-family dwellings" means buildings  
191 consisting of four or more units if such buildings have one or more elevators and ground floor units in  
192 other buildings consisting of four or more units.

193 C. Compliance with the appropriate requirements of the American National Standards for Building  
194 and Facilities (commonly cited as "ANSI A117.1") or with any other standards adopted as part of  
195 regulations promulgated by HUD providing accessibility and usability for physically handicapped people  
196 shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements of subdivision B 3.

197 D. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to invalidate or limit any Virginia law or regulation  
198 which requires dwellings to be designed and constructed in a manner that affords handicapped persons  
199 greater access than is required by this chapter.

200 **§ 36-96.4. Discrimination in residential real estate-related transactions; unlawful practices by**  
201 **lenders, insurers, appraisers, etc.; deposit of state funds in such institutions.**

202 A. It shall be unlawful for any person or other entity, including any lending institution, whose  
203 business includes engaging in residential real estate-related transactions, to discriminate against any  
204 person in making available such a transaction, or in the terms or conditions of such a transaction, or in  
205 the manner of providing such a transaction, because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex,  
206 elderliness, familial status, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap. It shall not be unlawful,  
207 however, for any person or other entity whose business includes engaging in residential real estate  
208 transactions to require any applicant to qualify financially for the loan or loans for which such person is  
209 making application.

210 B. As used in this section, the term "residential real estate-related transaction" means any of the  
211 following:

212 1. The making or purchasing of loans or providing other financial assistance (i) for purchasing,  
213 constructing, improving, repairing, or maintaining a dwelling or (ii) secured by residential real estate; or

214 2. The selling, brokering, insuring or appraising of residential real property. However, nothing in this  
215 chapter shall prohibit a person engaged in the business of furnishing appraisals of real property to take  
216 into consideration factors other than race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status,  
217 *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or handicap.

218 C. It shall be unlawful for any state, county, city, or municipal treasurer or governmental official  
219 whose responsibility it is to account for, to invest, or manage public funds to deposit or cause to be  
220 deposited any public funds in any lending institution provided for herein which is found to be  
221 committing discriminatory practices, where such findings were upheld by any court of competent  
222 jurisdiction. Upon such a court's judicial enforcement of any order to restrain a practice of such lending  
223 institution or for said institution to cease or desist in a discriminatory practice, the appropriate fiscal  
224 officer or treasurer of the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof which has funds deposited  
225 in any lending institution which is practicing discrimination, as set forth herein, shall take immediate  
226 steps to have the said funds withdrawn and redeposited in another lending institution. If for reasons of  
227 sound economic management, this action will result in a financial loss to the Commonwealth or any of  
228 its political subdivisions, the action may be deferred for a period not longer than one year. If the lending  
229 institution in question has corrected its discriminatory practices, any prohibition set forth in this section  
230 shall not apply.

231 **§ 55-248.47. Sale or lease of manufactured home by owner.**

232 A. *As used in this section:*

233 "*Gender identity*" means the gender-related identity, appearance, or other gender-related  
234 characteristics of an individual, with or without regard to the individual's designated sex at birth.

235 "*Sexual orientation*" means a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, bisexuality, or  
236 homosexuality."

237 B. The landlord shall not unreasonably refuse or restrict the sale or rental of a manufactured home  
238 located in his manufactured home park by a tenant. The landlord shall not prohibit the manufactured  
239 home owner from placing a "for sale" sign on or in his home except that the size, placement, and  
240 character of all signs are subject to the rules and regulations of the park. Prior to selling or leasing the  
241 manufactured home the tenant shall give notice to the landlord, including, but not limited to, the name  
242 of the prospective vendee or lessee if the prospective vendee or lessee intends to occupy the  
243 manufactured home in that manufactured home park. The landlord shall have the burden of proving that

244 his refusal or restriction regarding the sale or rental of a manufactured home was reasonable. The refusal  
245 or restriction of the sale or rental of a manufactured home based exclusively or predominantly on the  
246 age of the home shall be considered unreasonable. Any refusal or restriction because of race, color,  
247 religion, national origin, familial status, elderliness, handicap, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or sex  
248 shall be conclusively presumed to be unreasonable.