

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2019 SESSION

CHAPTER 179

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 54.1-2105, 54.1-2106.1, 54.1-2108.2, and 54.1-2109 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Real Estate Board; real estate licensees.

[S 1061]

Approved February 27, 2019

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 54.1-2105, 54.1-2106.1, 54.1-2108.2, and 54.1-2109 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 54.1-2105. General powers of Real Estate Board; regulations; educational and experience requirements for licensure.

A. The Board may do all things necessary and convenient for carrying into effect the provisions of this chapter and may promulgate necessary regulations.

B. The Board shall adopt regulations establishing minimum educational requirements as conditions for licensure. Board regulations relating to initial licensure shall include the following requirements:

1. Every applicant for an initial license as a real estate salesperson shall have:

a. At a minimum, a high school diploma or its equivalent; and

b. Completed a course in the principles of real estate that carried an academic credit of at least four semester hours, but not less than 60 hours of classroom, correspondence, or other distance learning instruction, offered by an accredited institution of higher education, high school offering adult distributive education courses, or other school or educational institution offering an equivalent course.

2. Every applicant for an initial license as a real estate broker shall have:

a. At a minimum, a high school diploma or its equivalent; and

b. Completed not less than 12 semester hours of classroom or correspondence or other distance learning instruction in real estate courses offered by an accredited institution of higher education or other school or educational institution offering equivalent courses.

3. Every applicant for a license by reciprocity as a real estate salesperson or real estate broker shall have:

a. Completed a course in the principles of real estate that is comparable in content and duration and scope to that required in subdivision 1 or 12 semester hours of classroom or correspondence or other distance learning instruction in real estate courses that are comparable in content and duration and scope to that required in subdivision 2; and

b. If currently licensed by another state as a real estate salesperson or broker, passed Virginia's examination.

C. The Board may waive any requirement under the regulations relating to education or experience when the broker or salesperson is found to have education or experience equivalent to that required. No regulation imposing educational requirements for initial licensure beyond those specified by law shall apply to any person who was licensed prior to July 1, 1975, and who has been continuously licensed since that time, except that licensure as a salesperson prior to such time shall not exempt a salesperson who seeks to be licensed as a broker from the educational requirements established for brokers.

D. The Board shall establish criteria to ensure that prelicensure and broker licensure courses meet the standards of quality deemed by the Board to be necessary to protect the public interests. For correspondence and other distance learning instruction offered by an approved provider, such criteria may include appropriate testing procedures. The Board may establish procedures to ensure the quality of the courses.

Noncollegiate institutions shall not be authorized to grant collegiate semester hours for academic credit.

The specific content of the real estate courses shall be in real estate brokerage, real estate finance, real estate appraisal, real estate law, and such related subjects as are approved by the Board.

E. The Board may establish criteria delineating the permitted activities of unlicensed individuals employed by, *or affiliated as an independent contractor with*, real estate licensees or under the supervision of a real estate broker.

F. The Board may take a disciplinary case against a licensee under advisement, defer a finding in such case, and dismiss such action upon terms and conditions set by the Board.

§ 54.1-2106.1. Licenses required.

A. No business entity, other than a sole proprietorship, shall act, offer to act, or advertise to act, as a real estate firm without a real estate firm license from the Board. Such firm may be granted a license in a fictitious name. No business entity shall be granted a firm license unless (i) every managing member of a limited liability company, officer of a corporation, partner within a partnership, or associate within

an association who actively participates in the firm brokerage business holds a license as a real estate broker; and (ii) every employee or independent contractor who acts as a salesperson for such business entity holds a license as a real estate salesperson or broker. An individual holding a broker's license may operate a real estate brokerage firm which he owns as a sole proprietorship without any further licensure by the Board, although such individual shall not operate the brokerage firm in a fictitious name. However, nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit a broker operating a brokerage firm from having a business entity separate from the brokerage firm for such broker's own real estate business, provided that such separate business entity otherwise complies with this section. A non-broker-owned sole proprietorship shall obtain a license from the Board.

B. No individual shall act as a broker without a real estate broker's license from the Board. An individual who holds a broker's license may act as a salesperson for another broker. A broker may be an owner, member, or officer of a business entity salesperson as defined in subsection C.

C. No individual shall act as a salesperson without a salesperson's license from the Board. A business entity may act as a salesperson with a separate business entity salesperson's license from the Board. No business entity shall be granted a business entity salesperson's license unless every owner or officer who actively participates in the brokerage business of such entity holds a license as a salesperson or broker from the Board. The Board shall establish standards in its regulations for the names of business entity salespersons when more than one licensee is an owner or officer.

D. No group of individuals consisting of one or more real estate brokers or real estate salespersons, or a combination thereof, shall act as a real estate team without first obtaining a business entity salesperson's license from the Board. A real estate team may hire one or more unlicensed assistants, *as employees or independent contractors*, as otherwise provided by law.

E. If any principal broker maintains more than one place of business within the Commonwealth, such principal broker shall be required to obtain a branch office license from the Board for each place of business maintained. A copy of the branch office license shall be kept on the premises of the branch office.

§ 54.1-2108.2. Protection of escrow funds, etc., held by a real estate broker in the event of termination of a real estate purchase contract.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for purchase transactions:

1. Upon the ratification of a contract, an earnest money deposit received by the principal broker or supervising broker ~~or his associates~~, *or an agent of such principal broker or supervising broker*, shall be placed in an escrow account by the end of the fifth business banking day following ratification, unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the principals to the transaction, and shall remain in that account until the transaction has been consummated or terminated.

2. In the event that the transaction is not consummated, the principal broker or supervising broker shall hold such funds in escrow until (i) all principals to the transaction have agreed in a written agreement as to their disposition, upon which the funds shall be returned to the agreed-upon principal as provided in such written agreement; (ii) a court of competent jurisdiction orders such disbursement of the funds; (iii) the funds are successfully interpleaded into a court of competent jurisdiction pursuant to this section; or (iv) the broker releases the funds to the principal to the transaction who is entitled to receive them in accordance with the clear and explicit terms of the contract that established the earnest money deposit.

At the option of a broker, written notice may be sent by the broker that release of such funds shall be made unless a written protest is received from the principal who is not receiving the funds by such broker within 15 calendar days of the date of such notice. Notice of a disbursement shall be given to the parties to the transaction in accordance with the contract, but if the contract does not specify a method of delivery, one of the following methods complies with this section: (a) hand delivery; (b) United States mail, postage prepaid, provided that the sender retains sufficient proof of mailing, which may be either a United States postal certificate of mailing or a certificate of service prepared by the sender confirming such mailing; (c) electronic means, provided that the sender retains sufficient proof of the electronic delivery, which may be an electronic receipt of delivery, a confirmation that the notice was sent by facsimile, or a certificate of service prepared by the sender confirming the electronic delivery; or (d) overnight delivery using a commercial service or the United States Postal Service. Except as provided in the clear and explicit terms of the contract, no broker shall be required to make a determination as to the party entitled to receive the earnest money deposit. A broker who complies with this section shall be immune from liability to any of the parties to the contract.

3. A principal broker or supervising broker holding escrow funds for a principal to the transaction may seek to have a court of competent jurisdiction take custody of disputed or unclaimed escrow funds via an interpleader action pursuant to § 16.1-77.

4. If a principal broker or supervising broker is holding escrow funds for the owner of real property and such property is foreclosed upon by a lender, the principal broker or supervising broker shall have the right to file an interpleader action pursuant to § 16.1-77 and otherwise comply with the provisions of § 54.1-2108.1.

§ 54.1-2109. Death or disability of a broker.

Upon the death or disability of a licensed real estate broker who was engaged in a proprietorship or who was the only licensed broker in a corporation or partnership, the Real Estate Board shall grant approval to carry on the business of the deceased or disabled broker for 180 days following the death or disability of the broker solely for the purpose of concluding the business of the deceased or disabled broker in the following order:

1. A personal representative qualified by the court to administer the deceased broker's estate.
2. If there is no personal representative qualified pursuant to subdivision 1, then an agent designated under a power of attorney of the disabled or deceased broker, which designation expressly references this section.
3. If there is no agent designated pursuant to subdivision 2, the executor nominated in the deceased broker's will.
4. If there is no executor nominated pursuant to subdivision 3, then an adult family member of the disabled or deceased broker.
5. If there is no adult family member nominated pursuant to subdivision 4, then an employee of, *or an independent contractor affiliated with*, the disabled or deceased broker.

In the event none of the foregoing is available or suitable, the Board may appoint any other suitable person to terminate the business within 180 days.