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SENATE BILL NO. 137

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

(Proposed by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
on February 7, 2022)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Edwards)

A BILL to amend and reenact § 19.2-298.01 of the Code of Virginia, relating to discretionary sentencing guidelines; written explanation; appeal.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 19.2-298.01 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 19.2-298.01. Use of discretionary sentencing guidelines.

A. In all felony cases, other than Class 1 felonies, the court shall (i) have presented to it the appropriate discretionary sentencing guidelines worksheets and (ii) review and consider the suitability of the applicable discretionary sentencing guidelines established pursuant to Chapter 8 (§ 17.1-800 et seq.) of Title 17.1. Before imposing sentence, the court shall state for the record that such review and consideration have been accomplished and shall make the completed worksheets a part of the record of the case and open for inspection. In cases tried by a jury, the jury shall not be presented any information regarding sentencing guidelines.

B. In any felony case, other than Class 1 felonies, in which the court imposes a sentence ~~which~~ that is either greater or less than that indicated by the discretionary sentencing guidelines, the court shall file with the record of the case a written explanation of such departure. *The written explanation shall adequately explain the sentence imposed to promote fair sentencing.*

C. In felony cases, other than Class 1 felonies, tried by a jury and in felony cases tried by the court without a jury upon a plea of not guilty, the court shall direct a probation officer of such court to prepare the discretionary sentencing guidelines worksheets. In felony cases tried upon a plea of guilty, including cases which are the subject of a plea agreement, the court shall direct a probation officer of such court to prepare the discretionary sentencing guidelines worksheets, or, with the concurrence of the accused, the court and the attorney for the Commonwealth, the worksheets shall be prepared by the attorney for the Commonwealth.

D. Except as provided in subsection E, discretionary sentencing guidelines worksheets prepared pursuant to this section shall be subject to the same distribution as presentence investigation reports prepared pursuant to subsection A of § 19.2-299.

E. Following the entry of a final order of conviction and sentence in a felony case, the clerk of the circuit court in which the case was tried shall cause a copy of such order or orders, the original of the discretionary sentencing guidelines worksheets prepared in the case, and a copy of any departure explanation prepared pursuant to subsection B to be forwarded to the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission within five days. Similarly, the statement required by §§ 19.2-295 and 19.2-303 and regarding departure from or modification of a sentence fixed by a jury shall be forwarded to the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission.

F. *A court's ruling on a defendant's objection to the calculation of the discretionary sentencing guidelines is reviewable upon appeal. The failure to follow any or all of the provisions of this section or the failure to follow any or all of the provisions of this section in the prescribed manner shall not, including the failure to provide a written explanation that adequately explains the sentence imposed, shall be reviewable on appeal or may be the basis of any other post-conviction relief. The failure to provide a written explanation that adequately explains the sentence imposed is reversible error.*

G. The provisions of this section shall apply only to felony cases in which the offense is committed on or after January 1, 1995, and for which there are discretionary sentencing guidelines. For purposes of the discretionary sentencing guidelines only, a person sentenced to a community corrections alternative program pursuant to § 19.2-316.4 shall be deemed to be sentenced to a term of incarceration.

2. That the provisions of this act shall apply only to sentencing hearings conducted and such sentences imposed on or after July 1, 2022.