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HOUSE BILL NO. 1052

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 10, 2024

A BILL to amend and reenact § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Department of Health; local government; alternative and conventional onsite sewage systems.

Patron—Batten

Referred to Committee on Health and Human Services

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 32.1-164 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 32.1-164. Powers and duties of Board; regulations; fees; onsite soil evaluators; letters in lieu of permits; inspections; civil penalties.**

A. The Board shall have supervision and control over the safe and sanitary collection, conveyance, transportation, treatment, and disposal of sewage by onsite sewage systems and alternative discharging sewage systems, and treatment works as they affect the public health and welfare. The Board shall also have supervision and control over the maintenance, inspection, and reuse of alternative onsite sewage systems as they affect the public health and welfare. In discharging the responsibility to supervise and control the safe and sanitary treatment and disposal of sewage as they affect the public health and welfare, the Board shall exercise due diligence to protect the quality of both surface water and ground water. Upon the final adoption of a general Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination permit by the State Water Control Board, the Board of Health shall assume the responsibility for permitting alternative discharging sewage systems as defined in § 32.1-163. All such permits shall comply with the applicable regulations of the State Water Control Board and be registered with the State Water Control Board.

In the exercise of its duty to supervise and control the treatment and disposal of sewage, the Board shall require and the Department shall conduct regular inspections of alternative discharging sewage systems. The Board shall also establish requirements for maintenance contracts for alternative discharging sewage systems. The Board may require, as a condition for issuing a permit to operate an alternative discharging sewage system, that the applicant present an executed maintenance contract. Such contract shall be maintained for the life of any general Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit issued by the State Water Control Board.

B. The regulations of the Board shall govern the collection, conveyance, transportation, treatment and disposal of sewage by onsite sewage systems and alternative discharging sewage systems and the maintenance, inspection, and reuse of alternative onsite sewage systems. Such regulations shall be designed to protect the public health and promote the public welfare and may include, without limitation:

1. A requirement that the owner obtain a permit from the Commissioner prior to the construction, installation, modification or operation of a sewerage system or treatment works except in those instances where a permit is required pursuant to Chapter 3.1 (§ 62.1-44.2 et seq.) of Title 62.1.

2. Criteria for the granting or denial of such permits.

3. Standards for the design, construction, installation, modification and operation of sewerage systems and treatment works for permits issued by the Commissioner.

4. Standards governing disposal of sewage on or in soils.

5. Standards specifying the minimum distance between sewerage systems or treatment works and:

a. Public and private wells supplying water for human consumption,

b. Lakes and other impounded waters,

c. Streams and rivers,

d. Shellfish waters,

e. Ground waters,

f. Areas and places of human habitation,

g. Property lines.

6. Standards as to the adequacy of an approved water supply.

7. Standards governing the transportation of sewage.

8. A prohibition against the discharge of untreated sewage onto land or into waters of the Commonwealth.

9. A requirement that such residences, buildings, structures and other places designed for human occupancy as the Board may prescribe be provided with a sewerage system or treatment works.

10. Criteria for determining the demonstrated ability of alternative onsite systems, which are not

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59 permitted through the then current sewage handling and disposal regulations, to treat and dispose of
60 sewage as effectively as approved methods.

61 11. Standards for inspections of and requirements for maintenance contracts for alternative
62 discharging sewage systems.

63 12. Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision 1 above and Chapter 3.1 of Title 62.1, a
64 requirement that the owner obtain a permit from the Commissioner prior to the construction, installation,
65 modification, or operation of an alternative discharging sewage system as defined in § 32.1-163.

66 13. Criteria for granting, denying, and revoking of permits for alternative discharging sewage
67 systems.

68 14. Procedures for issuing letters recognizing onsite sewage sites in lieu of issuing onsite sewage
69 system permits.

70 15. Performance requirements for nitrogen discharged from alternative onsite sewage systems that
71 protect public health and ground and surface water quality.

72 16. Consideration of the impacts of climate change on proposed treatment works based on research
73 and analysis from the Center for Coastal Resources Management at the Virginia Institute of Marine
74 Science at The College of William and Mary in Virginia.

75 C. A fee of \$75 shall be charged for filing an application for an onsite sewage system or an
76 alternative discharging sewage system permit with the Department. Funds received in payment of such
77 charges shall be transmitted to the Comptroller for deposit. The funds from the fees shall be credited to
78 a special fund to be appropriated by the General Assembly, as it deems necessary, to the Department for
79 the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this title. However, \$10 of each fee shall be credited to the
80 Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-164.1:01.

81 The Board, in its regulations, shall establish a procedure for the waiver of fees for persons whose
82 incomes are below the federal poverty guidelines established by the United States Department of Health
83 and Human Services or when the application is for a pit privy or the repair of a failing onsite sewage
84 system. If the Department denies the permit for land on which the applicant seeks to construct his
85 principal place of residence, then such fee shall be refunded to the applicant.

86 From such funds as are appropriated to the Department from the special fund, the Board shall
87 apportion a share to local or district health departments to be allocated in the same ratios as provided
88 for the operation of such health departments pursuant to § 32.1-31. Such funds shall be transmitted to
89 the local or district health departments on a quarterly basis.

90 D. 1. In addition to factors related to the Board's responsibilities for the safe and sanitary treatment
91 and disposal of sewage as they affect the public health and welfare, the Board shall, in establishing
92 standards, give due consideration to economic costs of such standards in accordance with the applicable
93 provisions of the Administrative Process Act (§ 2.2-4000 et seq.).

94 2. *The Board, in its regulations, shall establish a procedure for the Department to prepare and*
95 *submit a quarterly report to a local government that provides an accurate record of private properties*
96 *categorized by the presence of an alternative or conventional sewage system within each such local*
97 *government.*

98 E. Further a fee of \$75 shall be charged for such installation and monitoring inspections of
99 alternative discharging sewage systems as may be required by the Board. The funds received in payment
100 of such fees shall be credited to a special fund to be appropriated by the General Assembly, as it deems
101 necessary, to the Department for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this section. However,
102 \$10 of each fee shall be credited to the Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund established pursuant to
103 § 32.1-164.1:01.

104 The Board, in its regulations, shall establish a procedure for the waiver of fees for persons whose
105 incomes are below the federal poverty guidelines established by the United States Department of Health
106 and Human Services.

107 F. Any owner who violates any provision of this section or any regulation of the Board of Health or
108 the State Water Control Board relating to alternative discharging sewage systems or who fails to comply
109 with any order of the Board of Health or any special final order of the State Water Control Board shall
110 be subject to the penalties provided in §§ 32.1-27 and 62.1-44.32.

111 In the event that a county, city, or town, or its agent, is the owner, the county, city, or town, or its
112 agent may initiate a civil action against any user or users of an alternative discharging sewage system to
113 recover that portion of any civil penalty imposed against the owner which directly resulted from
114 violations by the user or users of any applicable federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances.

115 G. The Board shall establish and implement procedures for issuance of letters recognizing the
116 appropriateness of onsite sewage site conditions in lieu of issuing onsite sewage system permits. The
117 Board may require that a survey plat be included with an application for such letter. Such letters shall
118 state, in language determined by the Office of the Attorney General and approved by the Board, the
119 appropriateness of the soil for an onsite sewage system; no system design shall be required for issuance
120 of such letter. The letter may be recorded in the land records of the clerk of the circuit court in the

jurisdiction where all or part of the site or proposed site of the onsite sewage system is to be located so as to be a binding notice to the public, including subsequent purchases of the land in question. Upon the sale or transfer of the land which is the subject of any letter, the letter shall be transferred with the title to the property. A permit shall be issued on the basis of such letter unless, from the date of the letter's issuance, there has been a substantial, intervening change in the soil or site conditions where the onsite sewage system is to be located. The Board, Commissioner, and the Department shall accept evaluations from licensed onsite soil evaluators for the issuance of such letters, if they are produced in accordance with the Board's established procedures for issuance of letters. The Department shall issue such letters within 20 working days of the application filing date when evaluations produced by licensed onsite soil evaluators are submitted as supporting documentation. The Department shall not be required to do a field check of the evaluation prior to issuing such a letter or a permit based on such letter; however, the Department may conduct such field analyses as deemed necessary to protect the integrity of the Commonwealth's environment. Applicants for such letters in lieu of onsite sewage system permits shall pay the fee established by the Board for the letters' issuance and, upon application for an onsite sewage system permit, shall pay the permit application fee.

H. The Board shall establish a program for the operation and maintenance of alternative onsite systems. The program shall require:

1. The owner of an alternative onsite sewage system, as defined in § 32.1-163, to have that system operated by a licensed operator, as defined in § 32.1-163, and visited by the operator as specified in the operation permit;

2. The licensed operator to provide a report on the results of the site visit utilizing the web-based system required by this subsection. A fee of \$1 shall be paid by the licensed operator at the time the report is filed. Such fees shall be credited to the Onsite Operation and Maintenance Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-164.8;

3. A statewide web-based reporting system to track the operation, monitoring, and maintenance requirements of each system, including its components. The system shall have the capability for pre-notification of operation, maintenance, or monitoring to the operator or owner. Licensed operators shall be required to enter their reports onto the system. The Department of Health shall utilize the system to provide for compliance monitoring of operation and maintenance requirements throughout the state. The Commissioner shall consider readily available commercial systems currently utilized within the Commonwealth; and

4. Any additional requirements deemed necessary by the Board.

I. The Board shall promulgate regulations governing the requirements for maintaining alternative onsite sewage systems.

J. The Board shall establish a uniform schedule of civil penalties for violations of (i) regulations promulgated pursuant to subsection B and (ii) onsite treatment system pump-out requirements promulgated pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (§ 62.1-44.15:67 et seq.) in localities in which compliance with such onsite treatment system pump-out requirements is managed and enforced by the Department that are not remedied within 30 days after service of notice from the Department. Civil penalties collected pursuant to this chapter shall be credited to the Environmental Health Education and Training Fund established pursuant to § 32.1-248.3.

This schedule of civil penalties shall be uniform for each type of specified violation, and the penalty for any one violation shall be not more than \$100 for the initial violation and not more than \$150 for each additional violation. Each day during which the violation is found to have existed shall constitute a separate offense. However, specified violations arising from the same operative set of facts shall not be charged more than once in any 10-day period, and a series of specified violations arising from the same operative set of facts shall not result in civil penalties exceeding a total of \$3,000. Penalties shall not apply to unoccupied structures which do not contribute to the pollution of public or private water supplies or the contraction or spread of infectious, contagious, or dangerous diseases. The Department may pursue other remedies as provided by law; however, designation of a particular violation for a civil penalty pursuant to this section shall be in lieu of criminal penalties, except for any violation that contributes to or is likely to contribute to the pollution of public or private water supplies or the contraction or spread of infectious, contagious, or dangerous diseases.

The Department may issue a civil summons ticket as provided by law for a scheduled violation. Any person summoned or issued a ticket for a scheduled violation may make an appearance in person or in writing by mail to the Department prior to the date fixed for trial in court. Any person so appearing may enter a waiver of trial, admit liability, and pay the civil penalty established for the offense charged.

If a person charged with a scheduled violation does not elect to enter a waiver of trial and admit liability, the violation shall be tried in the general district court with jurisdiction in the same manner and with the same right of appeal as provided for by law. In any trial for a scheduled violation, the Department shall have the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence the liability of the

182 alleged violator. An admission of liability or finding of liability under this section shall not be deemed
183 an admission at a criminal proceeding.

184 This section shall not be interpreted to allow the imposition of civil penalties for activities related to
185 land development.

186 K. The Department shall establish procedures for requiring a survey plat as part of an application for
187 a permit or letter for any onsite sewage or alternative discharging sewage system, and for granting
188 waivers for such requirements. In all cases, it shall be the landowner's responsibility to ensure that the
189 system is properly located as permitted.

190 L. Effective July 1, 2023, requirements promulgated under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act
191 (§ 62.1-44.15:67 et seq.) directly related to compliance with onsite sewage treatment system pump-outs
192 shall be managed and enforced by the Department in Accomack, Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen,
193 King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northampton, Northumberland, Richmond, and
194 Westmoreland Counties, and the incorporated towns within those counties. Licensed operators
195 conducting onsite sewage treatment system pump-outs pursuant to requirements promulgated under the
196 Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (§ 62.1-44.15:67 et seq.) in localities managed and enforced by the
197 Department shall provide a report on the results of the site visit using a web-based reporting system
198 developed by the Department. Any person who violates the onsite treatment system pump-out
199 requirements promulgated pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (§ 62.1-44.15:67 et seq.) in
200 a locality in which compliance with such onsite treatment system pump-out requirements is managed
201 and enforced by the Department is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor.