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HOUSE BILL NO. 267

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 5, 2024

A BILL to amend and reenact § 18.2-57 of the Code of Virginia, relating to assault or assault and battery against law-enforcement officer; arrest and prosecution of individual experiencing a mental health emergency.

 Patrons—Watts and Price

Referred to Committee for Courts of Justice

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 18.2-57 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 18.2-57. Assault and battery; penalty.**

A. Any person who commits a simple assault or assault and battery is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor, and if the person intentionally selects the person against whom a simple assault is committed because of his race, religious conviction, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, color, or national origin, the penalty upon conviction shall include a term of confinement of at least six months.

B. However, if a person intentionally selects the person against whom an assault and battery resulting in bodily injury is committed because of his race, religious conviction, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, color, or national origin, the person is guilty of a Class 6 felony, and the penalty upon conviction shall include a term of confinement of at least six months.

C. In addition, if any person commits an assault or an assault and battery against another knowing or having reason to know that such other person is a judge, a magistrate, a law-enforcement officer as defined in subsection G, a correctional officer as defined in § 53.1-1, a person directly involved in the care, treatment, or supervision of inmates in the custody of the Department of Corrections or an employee of a local or regional correctional facility directly involved in the care, treatment, or supervision of inmates in the custody of the facility, a person directly involved in the care, treatment, or supervision of persons in the custody of or under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Justice, an employee or other individual who provides control, care, or treatment of sexually violent predators committed to the custody of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a firefighter as defined in § 65.2-102, or a volunteer firefighter or any emergency medical services personnel member who is employed by or is a volunteer of an emergency medical services agency or as a member of a bona fide volunteer fire department or volunteer emergency medical services agency, regardless of whether a resolution has been adopted by the governing body of a political subdivision recognizing such firefighters or emergency medical services personnel as employees, engaged in the performance of his public duties anywhere in the Commonwealth, such person is guilty of a Class 6 felony, and, upon conviction, the sentence of such person shall include a mandatory minimum term of confinement of six months.

No individual shall be subject to arrest or prosecution for an offense in violation of this subsection involving an assault or assault and battery against a law-enforcement officer if at the time of the assault or assault and battery (i) the individual (a) is experiencing a mental health emergency or (b) meets the criteria for issuance of an emergency custody order pursuant to § 37.2-808 and (ii) the law-enforcement officer subject to the assault or assault and battery was responding to a call for service requesting assistance for such individual. No law-enforcement officer acting in good faith shall be found liable for false arrest if it is later determined that the person arrested was immune from prosecution under this section.

Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to affect the right of any person charged with a violation of this section from asserting and presenting evidence in support of any defenses to the charge that may be available under common law.

D. In addition, if any person commits a battery against another knowing or having reason to know that such other person is a full-time or part-time employee of any public or private elementary or secondary school and is engaged in the performance of his duties as such, he is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor and the sentence of such person upon conviction shall include a sentence of 15 days in jail, two days of which shall be a mandatory minimum term of confinement. However, if the offense is committed by use of a firearm or other weapon prohibited on school property pursuant to § 18.2-308.1, the person shall serve a mandatory minimum sentence of confinement of six months.

E. In addition, any person who commits a battery against another knowing or having reason to know

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59 that such individual is a health care provider as defined in § 8.01-581.1 who is engaged in the
60 performance of his duties in a hospital or in an emergency room on the premises of any clinic or other
61 facility rendering emergency medical care is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. The sentence of such
62 person, upon conviction, shall include a term of confinement of 15 days in jail, two days of which shall
63 be a mandatory minimum term of confinement.

64 F. In addition, any person who commits an assault or an assault and battery against another knowing
65 or having reason to know that such individual is an operator of a vehicle operated by a public
66 transportation service as defined in § 18.2-160.2 who is engaged in the performance of his duties is
67 guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. The sentence of such person, upon conviction, shall also prohibit such
68 person from entering or riding in any vehicle operated by the public transportation service that employed
69 such operator for a period of not less than six months as a term and condition of such sentence.

70 G. As used in this section:

71 "Disability" means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a
72 person's major life activities.

73 "Hospital" means a public or private institution licensed pursuant to Chapter 5 (§ 32.1-123 et seq.) of
74 Title 32.1 or Article 2 (§ 37.2-403 et seq.) of Chapter 4 of Title 37.2.

75 "Judge" means any justice or judge of a court of record of the Commonwealth including a judge
76 designated under § 17.1-105, a judge under temporary recall under § 17.1-106, or a judge pro tempore
77 under § 17.1-109, any member of the State Corporation Commission, or of the Virginia Workers'
78 Compensation Commission, and any judge of a district court of the Commonwealth or any substitute
79 judge of such district court.

80 "Law-enforcement officer" means any full-time or part-time employee of a police department or
81 sheriff's office that is part of or administered by the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof
82 who is responsible for the prevention or detection of crime and the enforcement of the penal, traffic or
83 highway laws of the Commonwealth, any conservation officer of the Department of Conservation and
84 Recreation commissioned pursuant to § 10.1-115, any special agent of the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage
85 Control Authority, conservation police officers appointed pursuant to § 29.1-200, full-time sworn
86 members of the enforcement division of the Department of Motor Vehicles appointed pursuant to
87 § 46.2-217, and any employee with internal investigations authority designated by the Department of
88 Corrections pursuant to subdivision 11 of § 53.1-10, and such officer also includes jail officers in local
89 and regional correctional facilities, all deputy sheriffs, whether assigned to law-enforcement duties, court
90 services or local jail responsibilities, auxiliary police officers appointed or provided for pursuant to
91 §§ 15.2-1731 and 15.2-1733, auxiliary deputy sheriffs appointed pursuant to § 15.2-1603, police officers
92 of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority pursuant to § 5.1-158, and fire marshals appointed
93 pursuant to § 27-30 when such fire marshals have police powers as set out in §§ 27-34.2 and 27-34.2:1.

94 "Mental health emergency" means as a result of mental illness (i) there exists a substantial likelihood
95 that a person will, in the near future, cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by
96 recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (ii)
97 the person is severely disoriented or lacks the capacity to recognize reality.

98 "Mental illness" means a disorder of thought, mood, emotion, perception, or orientation that
99 significantly impairs judgment, behavior, capacity to recognize reality, or ability to address basic life
100 necessities and requires care and treatment for the health, safety, or recovery of the individual
101 experiencing such disorder or for the safety of others.

102 "School security officer" means the same as that term is defined in § 9.1-101.

103 H. "Simple assault" or "assault and battery" shall not be construed to include the use of, by any
104 school security officer or full-time or part-time employee of any public or private elementary or
105 secondary school while acting in the course and scope of his official capacity, any of the following: (i)
106 incidental, minor or reasonable physical contact or other actions designed to maintain order and control;
107 (ii) reasonable and necessary force to quell a disturbance or remove a student from the scene of a
108 disturbance that threatens physical injury to persons or damage to property; (iii) reasonable and
109 necessary force to prevent a student from inflicting physical harm on himself; (iv) reasonable and
110 necessary force for self-defense or the defense of others; or (v) reasonable and necessary force to obtain
111 possession of weapons or other dangerous objects or controlled substances or associated paraphernalia
112 that are upon the person of the student or within his control.

113 In determining whether a person was acting within the exceptions provided in this subsection, due
114 deference shall be given to reasonable judgments that were made by a school security officer or
115 full-time or part-time employee of any public or private elementary or secondary school at the time of
116 the event.