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SENATE BILL NO. 120

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 4, 2024

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-3900, 2.2-3902, 8.01-49.1, 18.2-57, and 18.2-121 of the Code of Virginia, relating to hate crimes and discrimination; ethnic animosity; penalties.

Patrons—Subramanyam, Bagby, Ebbin and Favola; Delegate: Coyner

Referred to Committee for Courts of Justice

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 2.2-3900, 2.2-3902, 8.01-49.1, 18.2-57, and 18.2-121 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 2.2-3900. Short title; declaration of policy.

A. This chapter shall be known and cited as the Virginia Human Rights Act.

B. It is the policy of the Commonwealth to:

1. Safeguard all individuals within the Commonwealth from unlawful discrimination because of race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, military status, or disability in places of public accommodation, including educational institutions and in real estate transactions;

2. Safeguard all individuals within the Commonwealth from unlawful discrimination in employment because of race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or military status;

3. Preserve the public safety, health, and general welfare;

4. Further the interests, rights, and privileges of individuals within the Commonwealth; and

5. Protect citizens of the Commonwealth against unfounded charges of unlawful discrimination.

§ 2.2-3902. Construction of chapter; other programs to aid persons with disabilities, minors, and the elderly.

The provisions of this chapter shall be construed liberally for the accomplishment of its policies.

Conduct that violates any Virginia or federal statute or regulation governing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions including lactation, age, military status, disability, or ethnic or national origin is an unlawful discriminatory practice under this chapter.

Nothing in this chapter shall prohibit or alter any program, service, facility, school, or privilege that is afforded, oriented, or restricted to a person because of disability or age from continuing to habilitate, rehabilitate, or accommodate that person.

In addition, nothing in this chapter shall be construed to affect any governmental program, law or activity differentiating between persons on the basis of age over the age of 18 years (i) where the differentiation is reasonably necessary to normal operation or the activity is based upon reasonable factors other than age or (ii) where the program, law or activity constitutes a legitimate exercise of powers of the Commonwealth for the general health, safety and welfare of the population at large.

Complaints filed with the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Law (the Office) in accordance with § 2.2-520 alleging unlawful discriminatory practice under a Virginia statute that is enforced by a Virginia agency shall be referred to that agency. The Office may investigate complaints alleging an unlawful discriminatory practice under a federal statute or regulation and attempt to resolve it through conciliation. Unsolved complaints shall thereafter be referred to the federal agency with jurisdiction over the complaint. Upon such referral, the Office shall have no further jurisdiction over the complaint. The Office shall have no jurisdiction over any complaint filed under a local ordinance adopted pursuant to § 15.2-965.

§ 8.01-49.1. Liability for defamatory material on the Internet.

A. No provider or user of an interactive computer service on the Internet shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided to it by another information content provider. No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be liable for (i) any action voluntarily taken by it in good faith to restrict access to, or availability of, material that the provider or user considers to be obscene, lewd, lascivious, excessively violent, harassing, or intended to incite hatred on the basis of race, religious conviction, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, color, or ethnic or national origin, whether or not such material is constitutionally protected, or (ii) any action taken to enable, or make available to information content providers or others, the technical means to restrict access to information provided by another information content provider.

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59 B. As used in this section:

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

62 "Information content provider" means any person or entity that is responsible, in whole or in part, for
63 the creation or development of information provided through the Internet or any other interactive
64 computer service.

65 "Interactive computer service" means any information service, system, or access software provider
66 that provides or enables computer access by multiple users to a computer server, including specifically a
67 service or system that provides access to the Internet and such systems operated or services offered by
68 libraries or educational institutions.

69 "Internet" means the international computer network of interoperable packet-switched data networks.

70 **§ 18.2-57. Assault and battery; penalty.**

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

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

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

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

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

107 E. In addition, any person who commits a battery against another knowing or having reason to know
108 that such individual is a health care provider as defined in § 8.01-581.1 who is engaged in the
109 performance of his duties in a hospital or in an emergency room on the premises of any clinic or other
110 facility rendering emergency medical care is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. The sentence of such
111 person, upon conviction, shall include a term of confinement of 15 days in jail, two days of which shall
112 be a mandatory minimum term of confinement.

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

119 G. As used in this section:

120 "Disability" means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a

121 person's major life activities.

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

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

129 "Law-enforcement officer" means any full-time or part-time employee of a police department or
130 sheriff's office that is part of or administered by the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof
131 who is responsible for the prevention or detection of crime and the enforcement of the penal, traffic or
132 highway laws of the Commonwealth, any conservation officer of the Department of Conservation and
133 Recreation commissioned pursuant to § 10.1-115, any special agent of the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage
134 Control Authority, conservation police officers appointed pursuant to § 29.1-200, full-time sworn
135 members of the enforcement division of the Department of Motor Vehicles appointed pursuant to
136 § 46.2-217, and any employee with internal investigations authority designated by the Department of
137 Corrections pursuant to subdivision 11 of § 53.1-10, and such officer also includes jail officers in local
138 and regional correctional facilities, all deputy sheriffs, whether assigned to law-enforcement duties, court
139 services or local jail responsibilities, auxiliary police officers appointed or provided for pursuant to
140 §§ 15.2-1731 and 15.2-1733, auxiliary deputy sheriffs appointed pursuant to § 15.2-1603, police officers
141 of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority pursuant to § 5.1-158, and fire marshals appointed
142 pursuant to § 27-30 when such fire marshals have police powers as set out in §§ 27-34.2 and 27-34.2:1.

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

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

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

158 **§ 18.2-121. Entering property of another for purpose of damaging it, etc.**

159 A. As used in this section, "disability" means a physical or mental impairment that substantially
160 limits one or more of a person's major life activities.

161 B. It is unlawful for any person to enter the land, dwelling, outhouse, or any other building of
162 another for the purpose of damaging such property or any of the contents thereof or in any manner to
163 interfere with the rights of the owner, user, or occupant thereof to use such property free from
164 interference.

165 Any person violating the provisions of this section is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. However, if a
166 person intentionally selects the property entered because of the race, religious conviction, color, gender,
167 disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or *ethnic or* national origin of the owner, user, or occupant
168 of the property, the person is guilty of a Class 6 felony, and the penalty upon conviction shall include a
169 term of confinement of at least six months.

170 **2. That the provisions of this act may result in a net increase in periods of imprisonment or**
171 **commitment. Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4 of the Code of Virginia, the estimated amount of the**
172 **necessary appropriation cannot be determined for periods of imprisonment in state adult**
173 **correctional facilities; therefore, Chapter 1 of the Acts of Assembly of 2023, Special Session I,**
174 **requires the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission to assign a minimum fiscal impact of**
175 **\$50,000. Pursuant to § 30-19.1:4 of the Code of Virginia, the estimated amount of the necessary**
176 **appropriation cannot be determined for periods of commitment to the custody of the Department**
177 **of Juvenile Justice.**

178 **3. That the provisions of this act shall not be construed to diminish or infringe upon any right**
179 **protected under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States or under the**
180 **Constitution of Virginia.**