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HOUSE BILL NO. 246

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 8, 2026

A BILL to amend and reenact § 18.2-57 of the Code of Virginia, relating to affirmative defense or reduced penalty for mental illness, neurocognitive disorder, or intellectual or developmental disability.

Patron—Watts

Committee Referral Pending

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 ethnic 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 ethnic 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 H, 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.

It is an affirmative defense to prosecution of a person for assault or assault and battery under this subsection if such person proves, by a preponderance of the evidence, that at the time of the assault or assault and battery (i) the person's behaviors were a result of (a) mental illness as defined in § 37.2-100 or (b) a neurocognitive disorder, including dementia, or an intellectual disability or a developmental disability such as autism spectrum disorder, as defined in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association, or (ii) the person met the criteria for issuance of an emergency custody order pursuant to § 37.2-808. If such person intends to introduce evidence pursuant to this subsection, he, or his counsel, shall give notice in writing to the attorney for the Commonwealth at least 60 days prior to his trial in circuit court, or at least 14 days if the trial date is set within 21 days of his last court appearance, of his intention to present such evidence. In the event that such notice is not given, and the person proffers such evidence at his trial as a defense, then the court may in its discretion either allow the Commonwealth a continuance or, under appropriate circumstances, bar such person from presenting such evidence. The period of any such continuance shall not be counted for speedy trial purposes under § 19.2-243.

If such person does not prove by a preponderance of the evidence that at the time of the assault or assault and battery his behaviors were a result of his mental illness, intellectual disability, developmental disability, or neurocognitive disorder but the evidence establishes that his mental illness, intellectual disability, developmental disability, or neurocognitive disorder otherwise contributed to his behaviors, the finder of fact may find such person guilty of a misdemeanor pursuant to subsection A.

Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to allow an affirmative defense for voluntary intoxication.

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

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59 available under common law.

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

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

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

79 G. In addition, any person who commits a battery against another knowing or having reason to know that
80 such individual is a sports official for an entity sponsoring an interscholastic or intercollegiate sports event or
81 any person performing services as a sports official for a public entity or a private, nonprofit organization that
82 sponsors an amateur sports event who (i) is engaged in the performance of his duties or (ii) is on the premises
83 of such event prior to engaging in his duties or upon conclusion of his duties is guilty of a Class 1
84 misdemeanor. The sentence of such person, upon conviction, may also prohibit such person from attending
85 any such sports event operated by the entity or organization that employed such sports official for a period of
86 not less than six months as a term and condition of such sentence.

87 H. As used in this section:

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

90 "Hospital" means a public or private institution licensed pursuant to Chapter 5 (§ 32.1-123 et seq.) of Title
91 32.1 or Article 2 (§ 37.2-403 et seq.) of Chapter 4 of Title 37.2.

92 "Judge" means any justice or judge of a court of record of the Commonwealth including a judge
93 designated under § 17.1-105, a judge under temporary recall under § 17.1-106, or a judge pro tempore under
94 § 17.1-109, any member of the State Corporation Commission, or of the Virginia Workers' Compensation
95 Commission, and any judge of a district court of the Commonwealth or any substitute judge of such district
96 court.

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

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

112 "Sports official" includes an umpire, referee, judge, scorekeeper, timekeeper, or other person who is a
113 neutral participant in a sports event.

114 I. "Simple assault" or "assault and battery" shall not be construed to include the use of, by any school
115 security officer or full-time or part-time employee of any public or private elementary or secondary school
116 while acting in the course and scope of his official capacity, any of the following: (i) incidental, minor or
117 reasonable physical contact or other actions designed to maintain order and control; (ii) reasonable and
118 necessary force to quell a disturbance or remove a student from the scene of a disturbance that threatens
119 physical injury to persons or damage to property; (iii) reasonable and necessary force to prevent a student
120 from inflicting physical harm on himself; (iv) reasonable and necessary force for self-defense or the defense

121 of others; or (v) reasonable and necessary force to obtain possession of weapons or other dangerous objects or
122 controlled substances or associated paraphernalia that are upon the person of the student or within his control.
123 In determining whether a person was acting within the exceptions provided in this subsection, due
124 deference shall be given to reasonable judgments that were made by a school security officer or full-time or
125 part-time employee of any public or private elementary or secondary school at the time of the event.

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