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1 **HOUSE BILL NO. 283**

2 Offered January 14, 2026

3 Prefiled January 9, 2026

4 *A BILL to amend and reenact § 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia, relating to child abuse or neglect;*
5 *prenatal use of a controlled substance or drug as prescribed.*

6 Patron—Gardner

7 Committee Referral Pending

8 **Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**9 **1. That § 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**10 **§ 63.2-1509. Requirement that certain injuries to children be reported by physicians, nurses,
11 teachers, etc.; penalty for failure to report.**12 A. The following persons who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child
13 is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or
14 city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the
15 Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline:

- 16 1. Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts;
- 17 2. Any hospital resident or intern, and any person employed in the nursing profession;
- 18 3. Any person employed as a social worker or family-services specialist;
- 19 4. Any probation officer;
- 20 5. Any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or child day program,
as that term is defined in § 22.1-289.02;
- 21 6. Any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis;
- 22 7. Any mental health professional;
- 23 8. Any law-enforcement officer or animal control officer;
- 24 9. Any mediator eligible to receive court referrals pursuant to § 8.01-576.8;
- 25 10. Any professional staff person, not previously enumerated, employed by a private or state-operated
hospital, institution or facility to which children have been committed or where children have been placed for
care and treatment;
- 26 11. Any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any public or private organization
responsible for the care, custody or control of children;
- 27 12. Any person who is designated a court-appointed special advocate pursuant to Article 5 (§ 9.1-151 et
seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1;
- 28 13. Any person 18 years of age or older who has received training approved by the Department of Social
Services for the purposes of recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect;
- 29 14. Any person employed by a local department as defined in § 63.2-100 who determines eligibility for
public assistance;
- 30 15. Any emergency medical services provider certified by the Board of Health pursuant to § 32.1-111.5,
unless such provider immediately reports the matter directly to the attending physician at the hospital to
which the child is transported, who shall make such report forthwith;
- 31 16. Any athletic coach, director or other person 18 years of age or older employed by or volunteering with
a public or private sports organization or team;
- 32 17. Administrators or employees 18 years of age or older of public or private day camps, youth centers
and youth recreation programs;
- 33 18. Any person employed by a public or private institution of higher education other than an attorney who
is employed by a public or private institution of higher education as it relates to information gained in the
course of providing legal representation to a client;
- 34 19. Any minister, priest, rabbi, imam, or duly accredited practitioner of any religious organization or
denomination usually referred to as a church, unless the information supporting the suspicion of child abuse
or neglect (i) is required by the doctrine of the religious organization or denomination to be kept in a
confidential manner or (ii) would be subject to § 8.01-400 or 19.2-271.3 if offered as evidence in court; and
- 35 20. Any person who engages in the practice of behavior analysis, as defined in § 54.1-2900.

If neither the locality in which the child resides nor where the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred is known, then such report shall be made to the local department of the county or city where the abuse or neglect was discovered or to the Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.

If an employee of the local department is suspected of abusing or neglecting a child, the report shall be made to the court of the county or city where the abuse or neglect was discovered. Upon receipt of such a

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59 report by the court, the judge shall assign the report to a local department that is not the employer of the
60 suspected employee for investigation or family assessment. The judge may consult with the Department in
61 selecting a local department to respond to the report or the complaint.

62 If the information is received by a teacher, staff member, resident, intern or nurse in the course of
63 professional services in a hospital, school or similar institution, such person may, in place of said report,
64 immediately notify the person in charge of the institution or department, or his designee, who shall make such
65 report forthwith. If the initial report of suspected abuse or neglect is made to the person in charge of the
66 institution or department, or his designee, pursuant to this subsection, such person shall notify the teacher,
67 staff member, resident, intern or nurse who made the initial report when the report of suspected child abuse or
68 neglect is made to the local department or to the Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline, and of
69 the name of the individual receiving the report, and shall forward any communication resulting from the
70 report, including any information about any actions taken regarding the report, to the person who made the
71 initial report.

72 The initial report may be an oral report but such report shall be reduced to writing by the child abuse
73 coordinator of the local department on a form prescribed by the Board. Any person required to make the
74 report pursuant to this subsection shall disclose all information that is the basis for his suspicion of abuse or
75 neglect of the child and, upon request, shall make available to the child-protective services coordinator and
76 the local department, which is the agency of jurisdiction, any information, records, or reports that document
77 the basis for the report. All persons required by this subsection to report suspected abuse or neglect who
78 maintain a record of a child who is the subject of such a report shall cooperate with the investigating agency
79 and shall make related information, records and reports available to the investigating agency unless such
80 disclosure violates the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. § 1232g). Provision of
81 such information, records, and reports by a health care provider shall not be prohibited by § 8.01-399.
82 Criminal investigative reports received from law-enforcement agencies shall not be further disseminated by
83 the investigating agency nor shall they be subject to public disclosure.

84 B. For purposes of subsection A, "reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected" shall, due to the
85 special medical needs of infants affected by substance exposure, include (i) a finding made by a health care
86 provider within six weeks of the birth of a child that the child was born affected by substance abuse or
87 experiencing withdrawal symptoms resulting from in utero drug exposure; (ii) a diagnosis made by a health
88 care provider within four years following a child's birth that the child has an illness, disease, or condition that,
89 to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, is attributable to maternal abuse of a controlled substance during
90 pregnancy; or (iii) a diagnosis made by a health care provider within four years following a child's birth that
91 the child has a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder attributable to in utero exposure to alcohol. *However, a*
92 *pregnant woman's prenatal use of a controlled substance or drug as prescribed by such woman's health care*
93 *provider shall not solely be a reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected.* When "reason to suspect"
94 is based upon this subsection, such fact shall be included in the report along with the facts relied upon by the
95 person making the report. Such reports shall not constitute a per se finding of child abuse or neglect. If a
96 health care provider in a licensed hospital makes any finding or diagnosis set forth in clause (i), (ii), or (iii),
97 the hospital shall require the development of a written discharge plan under protocols established by the
98 hospital pursuant to subdivision B 6 of § 32.1-127.

99 C. Any person who makes a report or provides records or information pursuant to subsection A or who
100 testifies in any judicial proceeding arising from such report, records, or information shall be immune from
101 any civil or criminal liability or administrative penalty or sanction on account of such report, records,
102 information, or testimony, unless such person acted in bad faith or with malicious purpose.

103 D. Any person required to file a report pursuant to this section who fails to do so as soon as possible, but
104 not longer than 24 hours after having reason to suspect a reportable offense of child abuse or neglect, shall be
105 fined not more than \$500 for the first failure and for any subsequent failures not less than \$1,000. In cases
106 evidencing acts or attempted acts of rape, sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, or object sexual penetration as
107 defined in Article 7 (§ 18.2-61 et seq.) of Chapter 4 of Title 18.2, a person who knowingly and intentionally
108 fails to make the report required pursuant to this section is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

109 E. No person shall be required to make a report pursuant to this section if the person has actual knowledge
110 that the same matter has already been reported to the local department or the Department's toll-free child
111 abuse and neglect hotline.