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SENATE BILL NO. 647

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 14, 2026

A BILL to amend and reenact § 19.2-60.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to use of unmanned aircraft systems by law-enforcement officers; search warrants.

Patrons—Pillion, Craig and DeSteph

Referred to Committee for Courts of Justice

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 19.2-60.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 19.2-60.1. Use of unmanned aircraft systems by public bodies; search warrant required.

A. As used in this section, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Unmanned aircraft" means an aircraft that is operated without the possibility of human intervention from within or on the aircraft.

"Unmanned aircraft system" means an unmanned aircraft and associated elements, including communication links, sensing devices, and the components that control the unmanned aircraft.

B. No state or local government department, agency, or instrumentality having jurisdiction over criminal law enforcement or regulatory violations, including but not limited to the Department of State Police, and no department of law enforcement as defined in § 15.2-836 of any county, city, or town shall utilize an unmanned aircraft system except during the execution of a search warrant issued pursuant to this chapter or an administrative or inspection warrant issued pursuant to law. Upon a finding of reasonable and probable cause by a judicial official authorized to do so by § 19.2-52, a search warrant shall be immediately issued.

C. Notwithstanding the prohibition in this section, an unmanned aircraft system may be deployed without a warrant (i) when an Amber Alert is activated pursuant to § 52-34.3; (ii) when a Senior Alert is activated pursuant to § 52-34.6; (iii) when a Blue Alert is activated pursuant to § 52-34.9; (iv) where use of an unmanned aircraft system is determined to be necessary to alleviate an immediate danger to any person; (v) by a law-enforcement officer following an accident where a report is required pursuant to § 46.2-373, to survey the scene of such accident for the purpose of crash reconstruction and record the scene by photographic or video images; (vi) by the Department of Transportation when assisting a law-enforcement officer to prepare a report pursuant to § 46.2-373; (vii) to capture digital documentation of a crime scene or response to a public safety call for service; (viii) for training exercises related to such uses; ~~(viii)~~ (ix) if a person with legal authority consents to the warrantless search; or ~~(ix)~~ (x) by a law-enforcement officer to (a) aerially survey a primary residence of the subject of the arrest warrant to formulate a plan to execute an existing arrest warrant or capias for a felony offense or; (b) locate a person sought for arrest when such person has fled from a law-enforcement officer and a law-enforcement officer remains in hot pursuit of such person or the offense location during the initial response to an incident; or (c) provide real-time aerial observation of law-enforcement incidents to increase on-scene safety and security, deliver essential supplies, and provide enhanced communication for emergency personnel in response to emergency calls; (xi) by law enforcement in response to large gatherings, demonstrations, disturbances, or other such events in the public domain to aid in maintaining the safety and security of event attendees and members of the public.

D. The warrant requirements of this section shall not apply when such systems are utilized to support the Commonwealth or any locality for purposes other than law enforcement, including damage assessment, traffic assessment, flood stage assessment, and ~~wildfire assessment~~ fire and rescue operations. Nothing herein shall prohibit use of unmanned aircraft systems for private, commercial, or recreational use or solely for research and development purposes by institutions of higher education and other research organizations or institutions.

E. Evidence obtained through the utilization of an unmanned aircraft system in violation of this section is not admissible in any criminal or civil proceeding.

F. In no case may a weaponized unmanned aircraft system be deployed in the Commonwealth or its use facilitated in the Commonwealth by a state or local government department, agency, or instrumentality or department of law enforcement in the Commonwealth except in operations at the Space Port and Naval/Aegis facilities at Wallops Island.

G. Nothing herein shall apply to the Armed Forces of the United States or the Virginia National Guard while utilizing unmanned aircraft systems during training required to maintain readiness for its federal mission or when facilitating training for other U.S. Department of Defense units.