

1 SENATE BILL NO. 798
2 AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
3 (Proposed by the Senate Committee for Courts of Justice
4 on _____)
5 (Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Mulchi)

6 *A BILL to direct the Judicial Council of Virginia to convene a work group to address legal deserts within the*
7 *Commonwealth; report.*

8 **Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

9 **1. § 1.** *That the Judicial Council of Virginia shall convene a work group of relevant stakeholders to make*
10 *recommendations for legislative solutions to address the disparities in the geographical distribution of*
11 *available legal services, known as legal deserts, within the Commonwealth.*

12 *The work group shall be composed of (i) two members of the House of Delegates appointed by the*
13 *Speaker of the House of Delegates; (ii) two members of the Senate appointed by the Senate Committee on*
14 *Rules; (iii) the Attorney General, or his designee; (iv) the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of*
15 *Virginia, or his designee; (v) the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Workforce Development and*
16 *Advancement, or his designee; (vi) two attorneys for the Commonwealth representing the Virginia*
17 *Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys; (vii) the Executive Director of the Virginia Indigent Defense*
18 *Commission, or his designee; (viii) the President of the Virginia State Bar, or his designee; (ix) one*
19 *representative of a law school of a public institution of higher education; (x) one representative of a law*
20 *school of a nonprofit private institution of higher education; (xi) a representative of a legal aid society; (xii)*
21 *one nonlegislative citizen member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates; and (xiii) one*
22 *nonlegislative citizen member appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. Each nonlegislative citizen*
23 *member shall be a public defender, retired attorney, retired judge, or attorney who is an active member of the*
24 *Virginia State Bar and is currently engaged in the private practice of law in the Commonwealth.*

25 *The work group shall create a definition of "legal desert" and shall make recommendations for enhancing*
26 *access to justice, legal advice and guidance, and constitutionally guaranteed legal representation for citizens*
27 *of the Commonwealth. The work group shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the*
28 *Chairs of the House and Senate Committees for Courts of Justice by November 1, 2026.*