

1 VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

2 *An Act to amend and reenact §§ 20-91 and 20-95 of the Code of Virginia, relating to divorce; adultery;*
 3 *filing; parties living separate and apart; work group; report.*

4 [H 303]

5 Approved

6 **Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**7 **1. That §§ 20-91 and 20-95 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**8 **§ 20-91. Grounds for divorce from bond of matrimony; contents of decree.**

9 A. A divorce from the bond of matrimony may be decreed:

10 (1) For adultery *that occurred prior to the date of the last separation of the parties*; or for sodomy or
 11 buggery committed outside the marriage;

12 (2) [Repealed.]

13 (3) Where either of the parties subsequent to the marriage has been convicted of a felony, sentenced to
 14 confinement for more than one year and confined for such felony subsequent to such conviction, and
 15 cohabitation has not been resumed after knowledge of such confinement (in which case no pardon granted to
 16 the party so sentenced shall restore such party to his conjugal rights);

17 (4), (5) [Repealed.]

18 (6) Where either party has been guilty of cruelty, caused reasonable apprehension of bodily hurt, or
 19 willfully deserted or abandoned the other, such divorce may be decreed to the innocent party after a period of
 20 one year from the date of such act; or

21 (7), (8) [Repealed.]

22 (9) (a) On the application of either party if and when they have lived separate and apart without any
 23 cohabitation and without interruption for one year. In any case where the parties have entered into a
 24 separation agreement and there are no minor children either born of the parties, born of either party and
 25 adopted by the other or adopted by both parties, a divorce may be decreed on application if and when they
 26 have lived separately and apart without cohabitation and without interruption for six months. A plea of res
 27 adjudicata or of recrimination with respect to any other provision of this section shall not be a bar to either
 28 party obtaining a divorce on this ground; nor shall it be a bar that either party has been adjudged insane,
 29 either before or after such separation has commenced, but at the expiration of one year or six months,
 30 whichever is applicable, from the commencement of such separation, the grounds for divorce shall be deemed
 31 to be complete, and the committee of the insane defendant, if there ~~be~~ *is* one, shall be made a party to the
 32 cause, or if there ~~be~~ *is* no committee, then the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the insane
 33 defendant.34 (b) This subdivision (9) shall apply whether the separation commenced prior to its enactment or shall
 35 commence thereafter. Where otherwise valid, any decree of divorce hereinbefore entered by any court having
 36 equity jurisdiction pursuant to this subdivision (9), not appealed to the Supreme Court of Virginia, is hereby
 37 declared valid according to the terms of said decree notwithstanding the insanity of a party thereto.38 (c) A decree of divorce granted pursuant to this subdivision (9) shall in no way lessen any obligation any
 39 party may otherwise have to support the spouse unless such party shall prove that there exists in the favor of
 40 such party some other ground of divorce under this section or § 20-95.41 B. A decree of divorce shall include each party's social security number or other control number issued by
 42 the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342.43 **§ 20-95. Grounds for divorces from bed and board.**44 A divorce from bed and board may be decreed for cruelty, reasonable apprehension of bodily hurt, willful
 45 desertion ~~or~~, abandonment, *or on the application of either party upon the parties living separate and apart*
 46 *with the intent of at least one of the parties to remain separate and apart permanently. No waiting period is*
 47 *required for the filing of a divorce from bed and board pursuant to this section, but such divorce may be*
 48 *decreed only in accordance with the provisions of § 20-91.*49 **2. That the Virginia Family Law Coalition, in conjunction with the Virginia State Bar Family Law**
 50 **Section, shall convene a work group to consider whether to eliminate fault-based grounds for divorce**
 51 **under Title 20 of the Code of Virginia, including the feasibility of transitioning the Commonwealth to**
 52 **an exclusively no-fault divorce system. The work group shall be composed of at least one representative**
 53 **each from the Virginia Poverty Law Center; a Virginia-based domestic violence advocacy**
 54 **organization; the Department of Social Services; a faculty member from a Virginia law school with**
 55 **expertise in family law; two members of the Senate of Virginia, one of whom shall be appointed by the**
 56 **Senate Majority Leader and one of whom shall be appointed by the Senate Minority Leader; two**

57 members of the House of Delegates, one of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of
58 Delegates and one of whom shall be appointed by the House Minority Leader; and other relevant
59 stakeholders. The work group shall study and develop recommendations with respect to the following:
60 (i) whether or not to eliminate all fault-based grounds for divorce currently set forth in § 20-91 of the
61 Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, and whether or not to adopt, including the feasibility of
62 adopting, irretrievable breakdown of the marriage or irreconcilable differences as the sole grounds for
63 divorce; (ii) whether to modify or eliminate mandatory separation periods currently required under
64 Virginia law as a precondition to no-fault divorce, with particular attention to the impact of such
65 requirements on survivors of domestic violence and low-income Virginians; (iii) the extent, if any, to
66 which fault should continue to be considered in equitable distribution of marital property under
67 § 20-107.3 of the Code of Virginia, spousal support awards under § 20-107.1 of the Code of Virginia, or
68 other collateral matters; (iv) protections for domestic violence survivors in no-fault divorce
69 proceedings, including provisions to prevent the use of divorce proceedings as an instrument of further
70 abuse or coercive control; (v) access to justice considerations, including the feasibility of simplified
71 procedures for uncontested no-fault divorces and expanded use of mediation and alternative dispute
72 resolution; and (vi) review of comparable no-fault divorce statutes enacted in other states and the
73 Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act. The work group shall submit a report of its findings and
74 recommendations to the Governor and to the Chairs of the House and Senate Committees for Courts
75 of Justice no later than December 1, 2026.