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HOUSE BILL NO. 155

Offered January 12, 2022

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A BILL to amend and reenact § 2.2-1617 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity; business permitting program; estimates of time required of a small business for permitting.

 Patron—March

Referred to Committee on General Laws

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 2.2-1617 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 2.2-1617. One-stop small business permitting program.**

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

"Business Permitting Center" or "Center" means the business registration and permitting center established by this section and located in and under the administrative control of the Department.

"Comprehensive application" means a document incorporating pertinent data from existing applications for permits covered under this section.

"Comprehensive permit" means the single document designed for public display issued by the Business Permitting Center that certifies state agency permit approval and that incorporates the endorsements for individual permits included in the comprehensive permitting program.

"Comprehensive permitting program" or "Program" means the mechanism by which comprehensive permits are issued and renewed, permit and regulatory information is disseminated, and account data is exchanged by state agencies.

"Permit" means the whole or part of any state agency permit, license, certificate, approval, registration, charter, or any form or permission required by law, to engage in activity associated with or involving the establishment of a small business in the Commonwealth.

"Permit information packet" means a collection of information about permitting requirements and application procedures custom assembled for each request.

"Regulatory" means all permitting and other governmental or statutory requirements establishing a small business or professional activities associated with establishing a small business.

"Regulatory agency" means any state agency, board, commission, or division that regulates one or more professions, occupations, industries, businesses, or activities.

"Renewal application" means a document used to collect pertinent data for renewal of permits covered under this section.

"Small business" means an independently owned and operated business that, together with affiliates, has 250 or fewer employees or average annual gross receipts of \$10 million or less averaged over the previous three years.

"Veteran" means an individual who has served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.

B. There is created within the Department the comprehensive permitting program (the Program). The Program is established to serve as a single access point to aid entrepreneurs in filling out the various permit applications associated with establishing a small business in Virginia. The Program in no way supersedes or supplants any regulatory authority granted to any state agency with permits covered by this section. As part of the Program, the Department shall coordinate with the regulatory agency, and the regulatory agency shall determine, consistent with applicable law, what types of permits are appropriate for inclusion in the Program as well as the rules governing the submission of and payment for those permits. The website of the Department shall provide access to information regarding the Program. The Department shall have the power and duty to:

1. Create a comprehensive application that will allow an entrepreneur, or an agent thereof, seeking to establish a small business, to create accounts that will allow them to acquire the appropriate permits required in the Commonwealth. The comprehensive application shall:

a. Allow the business owner to choose a business type and to provide common information, such as name, address, and telephone number, on the front page, eliminating the need to repeatedly provide common information on each permit application;

b. Allow the business owner to preview and answer questions related to the operation of the business;

c. Provide business owners with a customized to-do agency checklist, which checklist shall provide

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59 the permit applications pertinent to each business type and provide the rules, regulations, and general
60 laws applicable to each business type as well as local licensing information;

61 d. Allow the business owner to submit permit applications by electronic means as authorized by
62 § 59.1-496 and to affix thereto his electronic signature as defined in § 59.1-480;

63 e. Allow the business owner to check on the status of applications online and to receive information
64 from the permitting agencies electronically; and

65 f. Allow a business owner to submit electronic payment of application or permitting fees for
66 applications that have been accepted by the permitting agency.

67 2. Develop and administer a computerized system program capable of storing, retrieving, and
68 exchanging permit information while protecting the confidentiality of information submitted to the
69 Department to the extent allowable by law. Information submitted to the Department shall be subject to
70 the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (§ 2.2-3700 et seq.) as the same would apply
71 were the information submitted directly to the Department or to any permitting agency.

72 3. Issue and renew comprehensive permits in an efficient manner.

73 4. Identify the types of permits appropriate for inclusion in the Program. The Department shall
74 coordinate with the regulatory agency, and the regulatory agency shall determine, consistent with
75 applicable law, what types of permits are appropriate for inclusion in the Program.

76 5. Incorporate permits into the Program.

77 6. Do all acts necessary or convenient to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

78 C. Regulatory agencies shall, by November 30 of each year, provide the Department with
79 information outlining any changes to the agency's policies and regulations. The Business Permitting
80 Center shall compile information regarding the regulatory programs associated with each of the permits
81 obtainable under the Program. This information shall include, at a minimum, a listing of the statutes and
82 administrative rules requiring the permits and pertaining to the regulatory programs that are directly
83 related to the permit. The Center shall provide information governed by this section to any person
84 requesting it. Materials used by the Center to describe the services provided by the Center shall indicate
85 that this information is available upon request.

86 D. Each state agency shall cooperate and provide reasonable assistance to the Department in the
87 implementation of this section.

88 E. The State Corporation Commission and the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity
89 shall by January 1, 2020, establish one or more processes by which data or information relevant to the
90 Program can be collected and exchanged electronically.

91 F. Any person requiring permits that have been incorporated into the Program may submit a
92 comprehensive application to the Department requesting the issuance of the permits. The comprehensive
93 application form shall contain in consolidated form information necessary for the issuance of the
94 permits.

95 G. The applicant, if not a veteran, shall include with the application the handling fee established by
96 the Department. An applicant who is a veteran shall be exempt from payment of the handling fee
97 prescribed by this subsection. The amount of the handling fee assessed against the applicant shall be set
98 by the Department at a level necessary to cover the costs of administering the comprehensive permitting
99 program.

100 H. The authority for approving the issuance and renewal of any requested permit that requires
101 investigation, inspection, testing, or other judgmental review by the regulatory agency otherwise legally
102 authorized to issue the permit shall remain with that agency. The Center may issue those permits for
103 which proper fee payment and a completed application form have been received and for which no
104 approval action is required by the regulatory agency.

105 I. Upon receipt of the application, and proper fee payment for any permit for which issuance is
106 subject to regulatory agency action under subsection H, the Department shall immediately notify the
107 State Corporation Commission or the regulatory agency with authority to approve the permit issuance or
108 renewal requested by the applicant. The State Corporation Commission or the regulatory agency shall
109 advise the Department within a reasonable time after receiving the notice of one of the following:

110 1. That the State Corporation Commission or the regulatory agency approves the issuance of the
111 requested permit and will advise the applicant of any specific conditions required for issuing the permit;

112 2. That the State Corporation Commission or the regulatory agency denies the issuance of the permit
113 and gives the applicant reasons for the denial;

114 3. That the application is pending; or

115 4. That the application is incomplete and further information from or action by the applicant is
116 necessary.

117 J. The Department shall issue a comprehensive permit endorsed for all the approved permits to the
118 applicant and advise the applicant of the status of other requested permits. The applicant shall be
119 responsible for contesting any decision regarding conditions imposed or permits denied through the
120 normal process established by statute or by the State Corporation Commission or the regulatory agency

121 with the authority for approving the issuance of the permit.

122 K. Regulatory agencies shall be provided information from the comprehensive application for their
123 permitting and regulatory functions.

124 L. The Department shall be responsible for directing the applicant to make all payments for
125 applicable fees established by the regulatory agency directly to the proper agency.

126 M. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the
127 Comprehensive Permitting Fund, hereafter referred to as "the Fund." The Fund shall be established on
128 the books of the Comptroller. The Fund shall consist of all moneys collected from the handling fee
129 established by the Department pursuant to subsection G and such other funds as may be appropriated by
130 the General Assembly. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited
131 to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall
132 not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely to
133 administer the Program. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State
134 Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director of the
135 Department.

136 N. Unless otherwise directed by the regulatory agency, the Department shall not issue or renew a
137 comprehensive permit to any person under any of the following circumstances:

138 1. The person does not have a valid tax registration, if required;

139 2. The person is a corporation, limited liability company, business trust, limited partnership, or
140 registered limited liability partnership that (i) is delinquent in the payment of fees or penalties collected
141 by the State Corporation Commission pursuant to the business entity statutes it administers, (ii) does not
142 exist, or (iii) is not authorized to transact business in the Commonwealth pursuant to one of the business
143 entity statutes administered by the State Corporation Commission; or

144 3. The person has not submitted the sum of all fees and deposits required for the requested
145 individual permit endorsements, any outstanding comprehensive permit delinquency fee, or other fees
146 and penalties to be collected through the comprehensive permitting program.

147 O. The Department shall develop and provide guidance to businesses with newly approved permits
148 regarding responsibilities and requirements for maintaining such business. Such guidance shall include
149 information regarding sales tax and unemployment tax requirements, workers' compensation insurance
150 requirements, and postings required by the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry and the U.S.
151 Department of Labor. Any guidance provided for in this subsection may be provided electronically.

152 P. *The Department, in consultation with regulatory agencies, shall make a reasonable estimation of*
153 *the time required of a small business to compile information and submit an application for the*
154 *comprehensive permit and each permit not included in the comprehensive permitting program. Such*
155 *estimation shall include an aggregated time required estimation for each type of business. The*
156 *Department shall publish the estimations on its website and shall update such estimation as necessary*
157 *based on information provided to the Department pursuant to subsection C.*

158 Q. The Department may adopt regulations in accordance with § 2.2-1606 as may be necessary to
159 carry out the purposes of this section.