

New Laws Take Effect

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Most new legislation passed by the General Assembly takes effect on July 1. New laws taking effect this week include new statutes and amendments to existing statutes to respond to recognized needs as well as laws that reflect the changing whims and interests of individual legislators and the conservative tilt of the legislature. Fortunately, most new laws do not have a direct or personal impact on the lives of most of us.

September 11, 2001, influenced many laws that were passed. They include laws defining "acts of terrorism" and "weapon of terrorism" and punishment for the committing, aiding and abetting terrorism, manufacture and possession of terrorist and hoax devices, acts of bioterrorism against agricultural crops or animals, and the making of terrorist threats. Obtaining a Virginia driver's license for unlawful purposes is now a felony. Wiretap capabilities in response to terrorist activity have been expanded. Laboratories with dangerous microbes and pathogens are required to report their inventories and any changes to them to the Health Department.

Several new laws concerning domestic violence were passed. A statewide facilitator for victims of domestic violence was established. The Department of Criminal Justice Services is required to establish training standards and publish a model policy for law enforcement personnel in the handling of domestic violence cases. The laws on marital rape were expanded and strengthened. The witness protection program is expanded to include domestic violence cases.

Under a new law there is a rebuttable presumption that the driver of a vehicle has consumed alcohol if there is an open container in the passenger area of the vehicle. A new offense of aggressive driving has been created. Reflecting the higher costs of providing the service, vehicle inspection fees are increased from \$10 to \$15 and emission inspection fees from \$20 to \$28.

Taxpayers will earn interest on their state income tax refunds if the refund is delayed for more than 30 days for returns filed electronically or 60 days for returns filed by other means. Tattoo parlors and body-piercing salons are licensed and regulated under a new law. An amusement device rider safety act goes into effect on July 1. A woman's right to breast-feed her child on state property is now guaranteed. The maximum age of children who must be secured in child restraint devices when traveling in motor vehicles is increased from under four years old to under six years old. All schools are required to post the national motto, "In God We Trust."

The sales tax referenda and the proposed constitutional amendments will be discussed in future columns.

For more information on these or other new laws including the exact provisions and legislative history with voting records of legislation, visit my website at www.kenplum.com and click on Virginia General Assembly.