

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2015 RECONVENED SESSION

CHAPTER 774

An Act to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Chapter 5 of Title 19.2 a section numbered 19.2-60.1, relating to use of unmanned aircraft systems by public bodies; search warrant required.

[S 1301]

Approved April 30, 2015

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Chapter 5 of Title 19.2 a section numbered 19.2-60.1 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.

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) for training exercises related to such uses, or (vi) if a person with legal authority consents to the warrantless search.

D. The warrant requirements of this section shall not apply when such systems are utilized to support the Commonwealth for purposes other than law enforcement, including damage assessment, traffic assessment, flood stage assessment, and wildfire assessment. 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 Department of Defense units.