
By: Delegate M. Burns

Requested: October 19, 1995

Introduced and read first time: January 10, 1996

Assigned to: Judiciary

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Homicide - Prosecution - "Year and a Day" Rule Abolished**

3 FOR the purpose of abolishing the common-law rule of "year and a day"; allowing a
4 prosecution for murder or manslaughter to be instituted regardless of the time
5 elapsed between the infliction of the fatal injury and the death of the victim;
6 requiring the State to prove, by a certain standard, that the death of the victim
7 resulted from the injury inflicted by the accused; and generally relating to the
8 prosecution of homicides.

9 BY adding to

10 Article 27 - Crimes and Punishments
11 Section 415 to be under the new subheading "Homicide - Prosecution"
12 Annotated Code of Maryland
13 (1992 Replacement Volume and 1995 Supplement)

14 Preamble

15 WHEREAS, Under the current law, the common-law rule of "year and a day" bars
16 prosecution for murder or manslaughter unless the victim dies within a year and day from
17 the time the fatal injury was inflicted; and

18 WHEREAS, The conception of the "year and a day" rule may be traced back to
19 medieval times when the deficiencies of medical science often made it extremely difficult
20 to prove the cause of death whenever a considerable lapse of time intervened between the
21 mortal act or omission and the death itself; and

22 WHEREAS, This 700 year old common-law rule is now outdated, and in light of
23 medical advances in lifesaving techniques and the improvements in forensics technology,
24 there is no sound reason for retaining the rule today; and

25 WHEREAS, The State of Maryland is one of only three remaining jurisdictions in
26 the United States that has not yet abolished the rule and of these remaining jurisdictions,
27 is the only one that has not yet addressed the common-law rule of "year and a day" by
28 statute; and

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1 WHEREAS, The Court of Appeals of Maryland held in State v. Minster, 302 Md.
2 240 (1985), and State v. Brown, 21 Md. App. 91 (1974), that any change to the common
3 law "year and a day" rule should be made by the General Assembly; now, therefore,

4 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
5 MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

6 **Article 27 - Crimes and Punishments**

7 **HOMICIDE - PROSECUTION**

8 415.

9 (A) A PROSECUTION FOR MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER, WHETHER AT
10 COMMON LAW OR UNDER ARTICLE 27, §§ 407 THROUGH 411, § 387, § 388, OR § 388A,
11 MAY BE INSTITUTED REGARDLESS OF THE TIME ELAPSED BETWEEN THE
12 INFLECTION OF THE FATAL INJURY AND THE DEATH OF THE VICTIM.

13 (B) IN ANY PROSECUTION FOR MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER, AS DESCRIBED
14 IN SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION, THE STATE MUST PROVE BEYOND A
15 REASONABLE DOUBT THAT THE DEATH OF THE VICTIM WAS A DIRECT RESULT OF
16 THE INJURY INFLICTED BY THE ACCUSED.

17 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall be construed
18 only prospectively and may not be applied or interpreted to have any effect on or
19 application to any offenses that were committed before the effective date of this Act.

20 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
21 October 1, 1996.