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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 199

Offered January 24, 2000

Encouraging state agencies and private sector health-related organizations to adopt the new federal race and ethnicity classifications as other computer modifications are made and to implement administrative practices to comply with new federal standards.

Patrons—Melvin, Brink, DeBoer, Diamonstein, Hamilton and Morgan; Senators: Bolling, Lambert and Schrock

Referred to Committee on General Laws

WHEREAS, significant disparities continue to exist in the health status of African-Americans and Caucasians; and

WHEREAS, the adequate portrayal of the distinct health outcomes of African-Americans is difficult because much of the state's health data is not collected or reported by racial classifications; and

WHEREAS, a 1998 study conducted by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) concluded that further analysis was needed to develop a more accurate depiction of efforts to reduce health disparities between African-Americans and Caucasians, and to establish a baseline for analyzing and evaluating health data and health promotion activities; and

WHEREAS, House Joint Resolution 647 of the 1999 Session of the General Assembly requested the Commissioner of Health to establish a task force to review and examine health related data sets in the Commonwealth as part of a continuing analysis of the health status of African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, the task force established by the State Health Commissioner also was charged with recommending reporting processes to generate more reliable estimates of minority populations and examine how state agencies and private health organizations can assist by collecting and reporting data classified by race and ethnicity; and

WHEREAS, the task force found that many public and private health data sets in the Commonwealth do not include an appropriate level of information by race and ethnicity; and

WHEREAS, the task force also found that there is no consistent means for estimating the state's population by geographic area, locality, race, gender, and age which are used in calculating rates for disease and health conditions; and

WHEREAS, the adequate portrayal of the distinct health concerns of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic categories in the Commonwealth is dependent upon consistent and accurate sources of health-related data and populations estimates; and

WHEREAS, the task force concluded that data must be collected and reported by "minimal standards" for race and ethnicity categories if a true analysis of the health status of Virginia's diverse populations is to be achieved; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. standards for the Classifications of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity were recently revised to include new categories and definitions for race and ethnicity that will be used by the federal government as well as state and local governments, policymakers, researchers, and the public; and

WHEREAS, in Virginia, most state agencies that collect and report health-related information use the old federal standards for race and ethnicity; and

WHEREAS, a number of private sector organizations also collect and report race and ethnicity using the old standards; and

WHEREAS, none of the state agencies or private sector organizations studied by the task force provide specific staff training on collecting race and ethnicity information from the public; and

WHEREAS, the task force found that many organizations use observation or surname reference as a means for determining race or ethnicity rather than the national standard of having individuals self-identify race or ethnicity; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That state agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia and private sector, health-related organizations be encouraged to adopt the new federal race and ethnicity classifications as other computer modifications are made, or as soon as otherwise possible; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That state agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia and private sector, health-related organizations be encouraged to develop and implement training modules or guidelines to assist frontline personnel on how to ask race and ethnicity questions in a culturally appropriate manner; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That state agencies and private sector, health-related organizations be

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60 encouraged to adopt the national standard of "self-designation" of race and ethnicity for data collection
61 purposes; and, be it
62 RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Commissioner of Health distribute copies of this resolution to all
63 state agencies of the Commonwealth and private sector, health-related organizations throughout the
64 Commonwealth so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this
65 matter.