

003712576

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 289

Offered January 24, 2000

Requesting the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to designate an individual within that office to coordinate the work of a statewide network of local liaisons who will work to coordinate the efforts of faith-based, charitable and private organizations that desire to provide social services to state clients.

Patrons—McDonnell, Cantor and Katzen; Senators: Hanger, Martin, Stolle and Stosch

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

WHEREAS, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 eliminated the welfare system as we have known it for many years and replaced it with a system of time-limited benefits that emphasizes work as a priority; and

WHEREAS, states are now under a mandate to place large numbers of individuals in jobs and, by the year 2002, states must demonstrate that 50 percent of families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds are working; and

WHEREAS, many of these clients have already been placed in jobs but face the hurdle of long-term job stability while a number of other clients face additional problems such as low skills, substance abuse, domestic violence, and various health problems that complicate the process of job placement; and

WHEREAS, state and federal governments have long worked with religiously affiliated organizations for the delivery of public services, but there have been restrictions on the religious displays and indoctrination offered by these groups; and

WHEREAS, the 1996 PRWORA included a provision for "charitable choice" which, on its face, eliminates many of those secular restrictions on faith-based groups and was intended to encourage states to contract directly with faith-based social service providers in the delivery of these welfare services while protecting the religious character of the organizations and the religious freedom of clients; and

WHEREAS, while a great deal of concern has been expressed about the constitutionality of such provision and the potential for violating the Establishment Clause of both the Virginia State and the U.S. Constitutions, to date there have been no challenges on point from which to gain guidance; and

WHEREAS, for this reason and others, many states and faith-based organizations have moved slowly to commit to the concept of "charitable choice"; and

WHEREAS, a special task force convened by resolution of the 1999 General Assembly and chaired by the Lieutenant Governor examined the extent to which the "charitable choice" provision could be implemented in the Commonwealth in such a way that would meet constitutional scrutiny; and

WHEREAS, the task force agreed that providing assistance and information to faith-based, private, and charitable groups that want to provide social services to their clients would be one appropriate response to this issue at present; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Secretary of Health and Human Resources be requested to designate a liaison person in that office to coordinate the work of a statewide network of local liaisons, perhaps in regional Department of Social Services offices, to coordinate the efforts of faith-based, charitable, and private organizations that desire to provide social services to those in need; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That this liaison network could, among other things (i) provide outreach and information on available programs to the various organizations; (ii) provide training and organizational skills necessary to meet the various requirements of social programs, such as programmatic and fiscal audits; (iii) encouraging meetings, conferences, and other types of mentoring activities for the groups to learn from each other; (iv) initiate some technical assistance such as a web page, an "800" number, or other means of access to information; and (v) provide oversight and make regular reports to the Secretary on the status of such program.

INTRODUCED

HJ289