

2001 SESSION

INTRODUCED

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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 607

Offered January 10, 2001

Prefiled January 10, 2001

Expressing the General Assembly's apology for Virginia's experience with eugenics.

Patrons—Van Yahres, Almand, Darner, Diamonstein, Jones, D.C., Moran, Plum, Pollard, Robinson, Van
Landingham and Watts; Senators: Couric, Howell and Ticer

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the now-discredited pseudo-science of eugenics was based on theories first propounded
in England by Francis Galton, the cousin and disciple of famed biologist Charles Darwin; and

WHEREAS, the goal of the "science" of eugenics was to improve the human race by eliminating
what the movement's supporters considered hereditary disorders or flaws through selective breeding and
social engineering; and

WHEREAS, the eugenics movement proved popular in the United States, with Indiana enacting the
nation's first eugenics-based sterilization law in 1907, closely followed by Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, in 1924, Virginia passed two eugenics-related laws, the first, the Racial Integrity Act,
defined a white person as having no trace of black blood and made it illegal for whites and
non-Caucasians to marry; and

WHEREAS, the second 1924 measure permitted involuntary sterilization, the most egregious outcome
of the lamentable eugenics movement in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, under this act, those labeled "feebleminded," including the "insane, idiotic, imbecile,
feebleminded or epileptic" could be involuntarily sterilized, so that they would not produce similarly
disabled offspring; and

WHEREAS, in practice, the eugenics laws were used to target virtually any human shortcoming or
malady, including alcoholism, syphilis and criminal behavior; and

WHEREAS, still another regrettable aspect of the eugenics laws was their use as a respectable,
"scientific" veneer to cover activities of those who held blatantly racist views; and

WHEREAS, in a landmark 1927 decision, the United States Supreme Court upheld Virginia's
involuntary sterilization of Carrie Buck, in an 8-1 ruling written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes; and

WHEREAS, from then until 1979, Virginia involuntarily sterilized some 8,000 people, with estimates
of the precise number ranging from 7,450 to 8,300; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
express its profound regret over the Commonwealth's role in the eugenics movement in this country and
the incalculable human damage done in the name of eugenics; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the General Assembly urge the citizens of the Commonwealth to
become familiar with the history of the eugenics movement, in the belief that a more educated,
enlightened and tolerant population will reject absolutely any such abhorrent pseudo-scientific movement
in the future.

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