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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 139

Offered January 9, 2002

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Establishing a joint subcommittee to study the feasibility of city consolidation in South Hampton Roads.

Patron—Joannou

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Hampton Roads region is composed of 15 cities, counties and towns, and consists of an area of 2,000 square miles with more than 1.5 million residents; and

WHEREAS, the contiguous South Hampton Roads Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach consist of an area of over 1,000 square miles with more than one million residents; and

WHEREAS, these five cities face many similar challenges such as development and maintenance of transportation networks, economic development and the provision of basic governmental services such as water supply and wastewater treatment; and

WHEREAS, these cities also face a number of dissimilar challenges such as rapid population gain or loss and expansion or contraction of the public school system; and

WHEREAS, according to recent reports, the region as a whole has a per capita income of just 87.4 percent of the national average; and

WHEREAS, the region contains an enormous amount of tax-exempt property, thereby putting a significant strain on local revenue-raising ability; and

WHEREAS, the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach currently offer duplicative services that tend to lead to duplication of public resources; and

WHEREAS, the future welfare of the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach may depend on overcoming barriers to cooperation, such as Virginia's unique local government structure of independent cities; and

WHEREAS, the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach may be able to look to other examples throughout the country of how five localities can be consolidated into a single city; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study the feasibility of city consolidation in South Hampton Roads. The subcommittee shall consist of 23 members, which shall include seven legislative members and 16 nonlegislative members as follows: five members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House, in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; two members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections; the mayors of the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach; a member of a school board from one of the five cities, and a constitutional officer from one of the five cities, both appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates; a constitutional officer from one of the five cities, appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections; representatives from the community college system, the private sector of the maritime industry, the rail industry, and the homebuilding industry to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates; and representatives from the realtors association and the print media, all appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections. All appointees to the joint subcommittee, both legislative and non-legislative, shall live within the five cities.

In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall examine the feasibility of consolidating the Cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach into a single city. The joint subcommittee shall examine other models whereby localities were consolidated into a single city that operates under the strong mayor / council form of government, and determine whether such a system, with a directly-elected mayor, would be feasible in South Hampton Roads, to be phased in over a 10 - 20 year time period. The joint subcommittee shall further study the feasibility of permitting the consolidation of a particular city only upon a favorable vote by referendum in such city, and the procedure by which the consolidation may go forward with fewer than five cities if the referendum was rejected in one or more cities.

The joint subcommittee shall examine the feasibility of allowing the constitutional officers of each of the consolidating cities to retain their individual positions during an interim period of time or until the retirement of such an officer, and shall further explore an efficient method of eventually transferring the duties of such officers to a single office for the consolidated city.

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59 Other issues to be examined by the joint subcommittee shall include (i) the method by which the
60 individual debts and obligations of the consolidating cities shall become the debts and obligations of the
61 consolidated city; (ii) the feasibility of providing for oversight by an outside entity of new local debt of
62 the consolidating cities during the transition period between the time of voter approval of the
63 consolidation and the actual consolidation; (iii) the means by which utility systems within the
64 consolidating cities may be efficiently combined or coordinated so as to provide cost-effective and
65 uninterrupted service to the region; (iv) the feasibility of phasing in a consolidated school system under
66 the leadership of a single school board; and (v) whether an amendment to the Constitution of Virginia
67 will be required in order to implement a proposed consolidation.

68 All meetings of the joint subcommittee shall be held within the five-city area with at least one
69 meeting to be held in each of the five cities during the course of the study. The direct costs of this
70 study shall not exceed \$11,250.

71 The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. Technical assistance
72 shall be provided by the Commission on Local Government, the Department of Education, the State
73 Board of Elections, the Auditor of Public Accounts and the Department of Taxation. All other agencies
74 of the Commonwealth shall also provide assistance to the Commission, upon request.

75 The joint subcommittee shall complete its work by November 30, 2002, and shall submit its findings
76 and recommendations to the Governor and the 2003 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the
77 procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative
78 documents.

79 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
80 Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the
81 study.