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**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 154**

Offered January 14, 2004

Prefiled January 14, 2004

*Designating October, in 2004 and in each succeeding year, as Health Literacy Month in Virginia.*

Patrons—Baskerville and Watts

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, although Americans are reportedly more educated today than at any time in history, the increase in educational attainment has not resulted in higher reading skills or greater comprehension; and

WHEREAS, literacy is a problem among the elderly, many adults struggle to comprehend information with unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts, and others have difficulty locating the expiration date on a driver's license, determining the location of a meeting on a form, completing basic forms, reading maps, and comprehending prescription bottles, appointment slips, and other essential health-related materials; and

WHEREAS, medical technology and discovery have advanced at a unparalleled rate than in any previous time, yet too many persons have not kept pace in adopting lifestyles and health behaviors to live longer and more productive lives; and

WHEREAS, health literacy, the ability to read, understand, and act appropriately and responsibly to medical information and instructions, is needed to navigate complicated health care system and to successfully function as a patient; and

WHEREAS, health literacy is essential to health promotion, particularly in addressing primary prevention issues, and as patients are asked to assume more responsibility for self-care, health literacy problems have grown and contribute to ineffective communication between health providers and patients, misdiagnosis, and medical errors due to misinformation about medications and self-care instructions; and

WHEREAS, low health literacy, a major barrier to health care cost containment, is a widespread but unrecognized problem, contributing to poor health outcomes, longer hospital stays, inefficient and unnecessary care, uninformed and impotent patients who are unable to assume an active role in their health own care; and

WHEREAS, approximately half of the population in the nation possesses low or marginal literacy skills, and vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, chronically ill, and lower income individuals are at greater risk for low health literacy; and

WHEREAS, many persons most at risk for low health literacy receive assistance through public health and welfare programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, WIC, and maternal and child health programs; and

WHEREAS, these persons experience confusion when completing medical or insurance forms, have more difficulty understanding coverage rules such as referrals for specialty care and to network providers, and such persons may not provide adequate informed consent; and

WHEREAS, with the proliferation of health information through new technologies and formats, many persons will not be able to access and comprehend essential medical information; and

WHEREAS, these persons will require assistance in understanding medical concepts, reading prescriptions, and adopting healthier lifestyles, and such information must be provided orally or written in simplified language at a level commensurate with their educational levels and proficiency in the English language; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly designate October in 2004 and in each succeeding year, as Health Literacy Month in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to the Commissioner of Health, the Director of the Department of Health Professions, and the presidents of the Medical Society of Virginia and the Old Dominion Medical Society, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of this month on the General Assembly's website.

INTRODUCED

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