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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 71

Offered January 14, 2004

Prefiled January 14, 2004

Directing the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission to consider in its deliberations the status of and the educational needs of African-American students in Virginia. Report.

 Patron—Marsh

 Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, recent focus on school reform and rigorous academic standards have revealed a gap in the academic performance between African-American students and students of other races; however, this difference in achievement has been known to scholars since the early twentieth century; and

WHEREAS, the difference in achievement, commonly known as the "achievement gap," is revealed on many different measures of academic success, including achievement test scores, aptitude tests, grades, and college entrance exams; and

WHEREAS, although gains have been made in academic performance among such students, the gap persists, and recent national studies report a lag in achievement even among African-American students of affluent suburban schools; and

WHEREAS, while "nearly fifty-three percent of the African American population lives in the South, nearly ninety-one percent of rural African Americans live there, and poverty is concentrated more heavily in the Black Belt South than in any other region in the United States," according to the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which overturned the doctrine "separate but equal"; and

WHEREAS, visible racial distinctions still remain in America's public and private schools, which negatively affect the academic achievement of African-American students in preschool to graduate and professional schools; and

WHEREAS, too many African-American students attend substandard public schools in an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning, are taught by the least competent teachers, leave school before graduation, are more often suspended or expelled, are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted education programs, lack family and community support, and are discouraged from pursuing courses that would better prepare them for college success; and

WHEREAS, educators and researchers indicate that the academic achievement gap has deep roots that extend beyond the school that must be addressed to close the gap; and

WHEREAS, with the demise of the old segregated school system, and the loss of skilled, sensitive, yet demanding African-American teachers and administrators through integration, African-American students lost surrogate parent figures, disciplinarians, counselors, role models, and advocates; and

WHEREAS, although closing the achievement gap requires focus on high standards, a rigorous curriculum, competent teachers, and family involvement, traditional perspectives concerning the achievement gap are inadequate and all of the factors that affect the education of African Americans must be identified and addressed; and

WHEREAS, the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that public schools identify and address achievement gaps, and failure to resolve this critical problem will result in greater need for compensatory education programs, increased expenditures for social and public support services, higher rates of incarceration, and wasted human potential; and

WHEREAS, a comprehensive investigation and assessment of the educational needs of African-American students, and a deliberate plan and concerted action are needed to realize the promise of Brown; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission be directed to consider in its deliberations the status of and the educational needs of African-American students in Virginia. The Commission shall (i) conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the status of education of African-American students in Virginia; (ii) identify the factors contributing to the academic achievement gap between African-American students and students of other races; (iii) determine the educational needs of such students throughout the educational continuum; (iv) develop a plan to close the academic achievement gap; (v) propose recommendations to improve the education of such students; and (vi) consider such other related issues and concerns as the Commission may deem appropriate and necessary to accomplish the objectives of this resolution.

The Commission shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive

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59 summary and report of its progress in meeting the directives of this resolution no later than the first day
60 of the 2006 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary and report shall be
61 submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the
62 processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.