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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 96

Offered January 11, 2006

Prefiled January 10, 2006

Encouraging the Board and Department of Education and the Board and Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and other relevant entities to take certain actions to improve the education and treatment of individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

Patrons—Hamilton, Brink and Morgan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), as characterized by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), cause "varying degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions, and restricted, repetitive and stereotypical patterns of behavior"; and

WHEREAS, most often diagnosed in early childhood, ASDs range from severe (autistic disorder) "through pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), to a much milder form, Asperger syndrome"; and

WHEREAS, as noted on the NIMH website, "[t]here is no single best treatment package for all children with ASD"; and

WHEREAS, while noting that autism was only added to special education in 1991, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledges that the number of children classified as having ASD for purposes of special education services has increased "six-fold" from 1994 to 2003 and also recognizes that "it is clear that more children than ever before are being classified as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder"; and

WHEREAS, the CDC prevalence rates for ASDs have been summarized as "between 1 in 500 (2/1,000) to 1 in 166 children (6/1,000)"; and

WHEREAS, a 2001 study entitled Services Available for Individuals with Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders found "[f]ew professionals indicated that they received adequate preparation to teach children with autism during their preservice training programs and many indicated limited satisfaction with both their access to inservice training and the usefulness of the training they received"; and

WHEREAS, the 2001 study also indicated that there is a teacher shortage in special education; therefore, since that time, the Department of Education has provided additional training opportunities to teachers serving students with disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders through Training and Technical Assistance Centers that are located in the eight superintendent's regions around the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, some additional training opportunities for teachers of children with ASDs have become available, such as the Department of Education's Autism Priority Project Teams, George Mason University's online training program, and various courses offered by Virginia Commonwealth University, Regent University, and James Madison University as well as other Virginia institutions of higher education; and

WHEREAS, the Behavioral Health Care Subcommittee of the Joint Commission on Health Care has received presentations from school division representatives relating to the challenges of serving children with ASDs and did unanimously approve on November 10, 2005, the introduction of this resolution and the continuation of the study of autism in its 2006 workplan; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Board and Department of Education and the Board and Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and other relevant entities be encouraged to take certain actions to improve the education and treatment of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. During the regulatory review and public comment periods for the proposed revisions to the Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia and the Virginia Licensure Regulations for School Personnel, the Board and Department of Education are urged to continue to implement initiatives designed to strengthen teacher qualifications, to include preservice and inservice professional development opportunities relating to the effective treatment of autism spectrum disorders, and to consider the treatment of autism spectrum disorders. Further, the Board and Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and other relevant entities are urged to continue to expand training opportunities that include approaches specifically addressing the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution

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59 to the President of the Board of Education and the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health,
60 Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this
61 resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General
62 Assembly of Virginia in this matter.