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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 729

Offered January 10, 2007

Prefiled January 10, 2007

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the Virginia Preschool Initiative. Report.

Patrons—Cox, Callahan, Griffith, Hargrove, Orrock, Putney and Wardrup

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, in 1992, the General Assembly created the Commission to Review Recommendations on Educational Opportunity, which evolved into the Commission on Equity in Public Education; this Commission proposed legislation in 1994, to improve student achievement and create a preschool program for at-risk four-year-olds; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly strengthened and expanded the preschool initiative in 1995 to provide comprehensive preschool programs to all of Virginia's at-risk four-year-olds who are not being served by Head Start; and

WHEREAS, funding for the statewide preschool initiative is shared by state and local governments based on the composite index of the local ability to pay; and

WHEREAS, appropriations for the Virginia Preschool Initiative increased from \$18.2 million in 2003-2004 to \$38.5 million in 2005-2006, and current appropriations raise the state's share per student from \$5,400 to \$5,700, increasing the 2006-2007 total estimated distributions to participating school divisions to \$49.6 million; and

WHEREAS, if all school divisions participated in the Virginia Preschool Initiative at 100%, the total state share of the costs would equal \$62.2 million for 2006-2007; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, the teacher-student ratio for preschool programs was changed to 18:1 for consistency with state law; and

WHEREAS, research demonstrates that high quality preschool programs can have a substantial impact on preparing at-risk children for K-12 education and success later in life; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown that intensive preschool services that utilize free medical care, social services, and dietary assistance for both parents and children from impoverished backgrounds yield a return on the investment by preventing future welfare, special education, and criminal justice costs; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's Preschool Initiative has been in effect since 1994; however, the General Assembly has not evaluated its effectiveness and program costs or assessed its accountability measures to determine the need for modifications; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) review the statutory authorization for the Virginia Preschool Initiative and funding therefor; (ii) determine the costs of the program to the state and localities since its inception; (iii) evaluate the effectiveness of the current program in preparing at-risk four-year-olds for school readiness and success; (iv) evaluate the continued K-12 academic performance of students who participated in the current preschool program; (v) identify and assess the program's accountability measures to promote effective programs and efficient use of public funds; (vi) study the concept of the Universal Preschool or Pre-K, including what other states have adopted these programs and their success, if any; (vii) evaluate the additional costs, if any, of aligning components of the Virginia Preschool Initiative with the Quality Standards checklist recommended by the National Institute for Early Education Research; (viii) determine whether research has been conducted concerning the efficacy of preschool programs for children of middle- and upper-income parents and report the findings and recommendations; and (ix) consider such other related matters as the Commission deems appropriate to meet the objectives of this study.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Education and the staffs of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2007, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the 2008 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall state whether the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its

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59 findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary
60 and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated
61 Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General
62 Assembly's website.