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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 661

Offered January 14, 2009

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Requesting that the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services convene a workgroup to develop a strategy to address issues related to feral cats. Report.

 Patron—Hull

 Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

WHEREAS, the number of free-roaming or feral cats in the United States is suspected to approach that of pet cats—which was 73 million in 2000; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services reported that pounds and shelters in the Commonwealth euthanized close to 63,000 of the more than 120,000 unwanted cats, half of which were identified as stray or feral, passing through those pounds and shelters during 2007; and

WHEREAS, reports published by the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association have identified important points of agreement including the need for a massive education campaign to provide information to the public and curtail the abandonment of cats, more cooperation among conservationists, animal control agencies, and advocates of trap-neuter-release programs, development of an oral contraceptive for cats, more research on trap-neuter-release techniques, rabies vaccinations for free-roaming cats, and reduction in the number of stray and colony cats; and

WHEREAS, those same reports published by the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association have also noted numerous points of continuing controversy including the location of colonies in public and wild lands, the extent to which feral cat sanctuaries contribute to a long-term solution, the appropriateness of trap-neuter-release programs through various climates, rabies vaccinations and other veterinary care for feral cats, the extent of feral cat predation on birds and other wildlife, the true fecundity of feral cats, and the role of euthanasia in solving the problems related to abandoned and feral cats; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services be requested to convene a workgroup to develop a strategy to address issues related to feral cats. The workgroup shall consist of representatives of the State Veterinarian, the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Municipal League, the Office of the Attorney General, the Circuit Courts and the General District Courts, the Humane Society of the United States, the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies, the Virginia Kincheloe Spay/Neuter Clinic, Virginians for Animal Welfare, Virginia Animal Control Association, Virginia Beach SPCA, Alley Cat Allies, and Bristol Humane Society.

In conducting its study, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall direct the workgroup to furnish analysis and recommendations for the following issues:

1. Whether there is a cat overpopulation problem in the Commonwealth;
2. Whether any overpopulation problem is the principal cause of feral cat colonies;
3. Whether any overpopulation of cats requires licensure of breeders, curtailment of breeding stock, or reduced-cost sterilization services;
4. Whether a cat may be considered abandoned if relinquished to a releasing agency or released from custody by an owner for reasons other than health of the owner, death, sudden economic emergency, or the expense of treating a medical condition of the cat;
5. Whether a colonist caretaker who cares for a feral cat colony is a rescue or releasing agency; and
6. Whether pounds should be required to provide cats with the same retrieval and custodial services now provided to dogs.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for this study, upon request.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall direct the workgroup to complete its meetings by November 30, 2009, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2010 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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