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## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 730

Offered January 14, 2009

Prefiled January 14, 2009

*Requesting the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians. Report.*

Patrons—Peace, Byron, Phillips and Shuler

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association, "America's livestock and meat industries have one of the world's best health and safety records; however, a projected severe shortage of food animal veterinarians may threaten this status"; and

WHEREAS, the Animal Welfare Division of the American Veterinary Medical Association has stated that "with the American public more focused than ever on food safety and security, the role of the food animal veterinarian has never been more important, and a shortage of large animal veterinarians would be catastrophic for the industry and for society"; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that there will be a shortage of 15,000 veterinarians in the next 20 years; and

WHEREAS, fewer than 80,000 veterinarians practice in the United States today, and only 15,000 are engaged in food-animal care, public practice, or herd-population medicine; veterinarians are a unique resource within the health-professions field, as they are the only health professionals trained in comparative medicine, playing a critical role in the linkage between agriculture, animal health, and human health, according to the article, "World Facing Shortage of Large-Animal Veterinarians," by Jeff Mulhollem and Chuck Gill, which was published in *PennState Live* on November 20, 2008; and

WHEREAS, testimony submitted to Congress in support of legislation to address the critical shortage of large animal veterinarians indicated that veterinarians who specialize in large animals guard the nation's food supply and are the health professionals trained to diagnose and contain diseases in animals that may be transmitted to humans; and

WHEREAS, the number of large animal veterinarians is dwindling due to the decline in family farms and the increase in better-educated farmers who are less dependent on veterinarians; nevertheless, the services of a large animal veterinarian are essential for the successful operation of an animal agriculture farm; and

WHEREAS, there is a critical shortage of veterinarians engaged in regulatory, public health, and diagnostic veterinary medicine, and in biomedical research and academia, and the 28 colleges of veterinary medicine in the nation are at full capacity, graduating 2,500 veterinarians each year; and

WHEREAS, according to the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association, since 1990, the number of veterinarians who specialize in treating large animals has dropped from nearly 6,000 to fewer than 4,500, and of this number less than 10 percent of veterinarians in private practice treat large food animals; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services reported 47,600 farms in the Commonwealth, less than half the number that existed in 1960, but data indicate that at least seven counties in Virginia have a shortage of large animal veterinarians: Appomattox, Bland, Giles, Smyth, Alleghany, Tazewell, and Highland Counties; and

WHEREAS, the number of veterinary students specializing in large animals nationally has dropped from 4.5 percent in 1990 to 1.7 percent in 2006; less than six percent of the students in the 2009 graduating class at Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine have a specialization in food animal medicine; and the number of students specializing in large animal medicine continues to decline despite nearly \$200,000 spent by the College in scholarships to recruit large animal veterinarians; and

WHEREAS, the veterinary public health infrastructure as well as the public health of humans is at risk due to the shortage of large animal veterinarians who are trained to protect the Commonwealth's and the nation's food supply; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University be requested to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians.

In conducting its study, the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine shall (i) determine the supply and demand for large animal veterinarians in Virginia, including by region of the Commonwealth; (ii) ascertain the causes of the shortage of such veterinarians and recommend immediate

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59 and long-term alternatives to ameliorate the demand; (iii) address the salary and working conditions of  
60 large animal veterinarians relative to the debt burden of recent graduates; (iv) propose incentives to  
61 encourage students to choose veterinary medicine as a career and large animal practice; (v) establish a  
62 profile of applicants to veterinary medicine school; (vi) determine the efficacy of increasing the  
63 Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine's capacity at Virginia Tech to serve more  
64 veterinary students; and (vii) consider such other factors that may influence the practice chosen by  
65 veterinarians.

66 In addition, the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine shall provide for the  
67 meaningful participation of representatives of the Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Agribusiness Council,  
68 Virginia Veterinary Medical Association, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services,  
69 Virginia Department of Business Assistance, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and State  
70 Veterinarian or their designees throughout the course of the study.

71 Technical assistance shall be provided to the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary  
72 Medicine by the State Council of Higher Education, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer  
73 Services, State Veterinarian, and Virginia Veterinary Medical Association. All agencies of the  
74 Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary  
75 Medicine for this study, upon request.

76 Upon completion of the study, the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine shall  
77 submit its report to the House Committees on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and on  
78 Education, and the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and on  
79 Education and Health, and these standing committees shall review the findings and recommendations of  
80 the report for appropriate legislative, policy, and budgetary implications and action, and make such  
81 recommendations as necessary.

82 The Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine shall complete its meetings by  
83 November 30, 2009, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary  
84 and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The  
85 executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of  
86 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the  
87 first day of the 2010 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General  
88 Assembly's website.