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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 124

Offered January 13, 2010
Prefiled January 13, 2010

Directing the Department of Health Professions to study access to medical care in rural Southwest Virginia.

Patron—Kilgore

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, access to quality health care in rural Southwest Virginia is a mounting problem faced by many citizens of that region of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, 43.4% of the citizens in rural Southwest Virginia live on incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty rate (as compared to 27.1% for the rest of Virginia); 11.8% of the population is enrolled in Medicaid (compared to 7.1% for the rest of Virginia), 49.3% of the population over the age of 25 has no high school diploma (compared to 24.8% for the rest of Virginia); 15.6% of the people are over age 65 (compared to 11.2% for the rest of Virginia) and the area suffers from chronic unemployment rates that are five times higher than the state average; and

WHEREAS, overall, this population far exceeds the state death averages for many diseases: its residents are 21% more likely to die from heart disease, 35% more likely to die from COPD, 40% more likely to die from unintentional injuries, 14% more likely to die from diabetes and 50% more likely to die from suicide and proportionately fewer babies in these counties weigh less than 2000 grams at birth, and disproportionately more babies die during the first year of life than in the rest of Virginia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Health Professions be directed to study access to medical care in rural Southwest Virginia. The study shall include (i) the feasibility and effectiveness of a pilot program narrowly tailored to the coalfield region whereby a mechanism would be set up to temporarily allow naturopaths (those who have graduated from, and met the residency requirements of, a naturopathic medical school that has been accredited by the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges) to provide preventative health counseling to the adult citizens of this region in the area of preventative medicine including smoking cessation, diabetes prevention, and diet and nutrition management, and (ii) ways to encourage more licensed medical doctors and doctors of osteopathy to practice medicine in these traditionally underserved areas, including fully funding of the tuition reimbursement program [Legislative Services to provide name of existing program] for physicians practicing in these underserved areas.

The Department of Health Professions is further requested, upon completion of its study, to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2011 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

INTRODUCED

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