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## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 243

Offered January 14, 2015

Prefiled January 11, 2015

*Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to review the Department of Veterans Services. Report.*

Patrons—Dance, Alexander, Barker, Black, Carrico, Cosgrove, Deeds, Ebbin, Garrett, Hanger, Howell, Lewis, Locke, Lucas, Marsden, Martin, McDougale, McEachin, McWaters, Norment, Obenshain, Petersen, Puller, Reeves, Ruff, Saslaw, Smith, Stanley, Stuart, Vogel, Wagner and Wexton

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2003 under the Secretary of Administration; and

WHEREAS, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) has not previously undertaken a review of the Department, yet the Department is now reporting to the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, its third Secretariat since 2003; and

WHEREAS, the Department is responsible for the establishment, operation, administration, and maintenance of offices and programs related to services for Virginia-domiciled veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents, including, but not limited to, benefits claims processing and all medical care centers and veterans cemeteries owned and operated by the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Department is organized into six service delivery sections - Benefits, Veterans Education Training & Employment, Care Centers, Veterans Cemeteries, the Virginia War Memorial, and the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates 23 benefits services offices throughout the Commonwealth where veterans and their dependents receive free assistance in developing and filing claims for federal veterans benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates the Commonwealth's three veterans cemeteries, which provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and eligible dependents; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates the Commonwealth's two Veterans Care Centers with a combined 400-bed capacity for the provision of long-term physical, occupational, and speech therapy, as well as therapeutic recreation, social and spiritual activities, and other services such as an on-site pharmacy; and

WHEREAS, the Department executes the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, which provides support to Virginia's veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard, Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves, and their family members; and

WHEREAS, Virginia has the nation's seventh-largest veteran population and is first in the nation in veterans population per capita, and this population is expected to grow over the next four years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to review the Department of Veterans Services.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) shall (i) review the changing demographics of the newest generations of veterans (post-9/11) and consider what changes are needed to the services currently provided by the Department; (ii) assess ways the Department is able to reach Virginia veterans such that all new veterans have easy access to information and services; (iii) assess the number, roles, and allocation of staff; (iv) assess whether needs of Virginia veterans are adequately addressed through the benefits claims process; (v) review the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program for any existing overlap of services provided by other state agencies and, in view of the unique care needs of veterans, determine whether or how such services can effectively be provided by other state agencies to reduce duplication and reduce the costs of providing such services; (vi) assess the delivery of services at state cemeteries to ensure services are consistent and determine if there are any possible efficiencies in consolidating daily or fiscal operations; (vii) assess the effectiveness of coordination with other agencies and the federal Veterans Administration; (viii) examine whether the statutory definition of "veteran" affects whom the Department is able to serve; (ix) review the structures and approaches by which other states carry out veterans affairs functions; and (x) review any other issues and make recommendations as appropriate.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Department of Veterans Services, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Social Services, Department of Health, Department of

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57 Military Affairs, and Department of Human Resource Management, shall provide assistance to the Joint  
58 Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this study, upon request. The Department of Veterans  
59 Services shall furnish information, including departmental records, to JLARC staff as requested in  
60 accordance with §§ 30-59 and 30-69 of the Code of Virginia.

61 The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30,  
62 2015, and the Director shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive  
63 summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the 2016 Regular Session of  
64 the General Assembly. The executive summary shall state whether the Commission intends to submit to  
65 the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as  
66 a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the  
67 procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents  
68 and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.