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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 299

Offered January 20, 2015

Directing the Virginia Housing Commission to study opportunities for and barriers to safe and affordable housing for people reentering society from Virginia's jails and prisons. Report.

Patron—McEachin

Unanimous consent to introduce

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, approximately 63,000 people are incarcerated in Virginia's prisons and jails; and
WHEREAS, many of those who leave prisons and jails and reenter society will have immediate housing needs; and

WHEREAS, access to federally subsidized housing for those convicted of felonies is often restricted by federal rule or local policy; and

WHEREAS, access to private housing for those convicted of crimes is often restricted by the rules of private landlords and provisions of the Virginia Code; and

WHEREAS, access to safe and affordable housing is further restricted for the ex-offender population because of the low wages many earn and the relatively high cost of housing in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, stable housing situations have been shown to be successful in helping to reduce recidivism; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Virginia Housing Commission be directed to study opportunities for and barriers to safe and affordable housing for people reentering society from Virginia's jails and prisons. In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall (i) review all laws that restrict, or allow a private or public housing provider to restrict, where a person is entitled to live based upon that person's criminal record; (ii) assess the availability and duration of temporary emergency housing provided by the Commonwealth to people who leave Virginia's jails and prisons; (iii) assess the availability of suitable housing to those inmates eligible for parole under Virginia's law allowing compassionate release of elderly and ill people; (iv) compare the average earnings of those released from Virginia's jails and prisons with the cost of available rental housing; and (v) make recommendations regarding improvements in the laws that would assist people reentering communities from jails and prisons find affordable housing without compromising the safety of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

The Office of the Clerk of the Senate shall provide administrative staff support. The Division of Legislative Services shall provide legal, research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the Virginia Housing Commission. Technical assistance shall be provided to the Virginia Housing Commission by the Department of Corrections. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Virginia Housing Commission for this study, upon request.

The Virginia Housing Commission shall complete its work by November 30, 2015, and the Chairman shall submit to the Governor and to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary and report of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the 2016 Regular Session of the General Assembly. 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 and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website

INTRODUCED

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