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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 704

Offered January 11, 2017

Prefiled January 11, 2017

Requesting the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Education to study the delivery of environmental education in the Commonwealth. Report.

Patron—Bulova

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, environmental education is essential to helping students of all ages understand how natural environments function and the linkage between a healthy environment, quality of life, and a strong economy; and

WHEREAS, environmental education increases student engagement in science and improves student achievement in core subject areas by allowing them to apply classroom learning to real world experiences; and

WHEREAS, environmental education supports and is an integral part of the Standards of Learning, including the areas of geography, biology, chemistry, language arts, and environmental and social sciences; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Education serves a vital role in advancing science-based environmental education; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth committed in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement to provide a meaningful Chesapeake Bay or stream outdoor experience for each student before graduation from high school and to enable each student to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills to act responsibly to protect and restore his local watershed; and

WHEREAS, a wide range of public and private entities provide environmental education in the Commonwealth, including local school divisions, state and federal agencies, institutions of higher education, local governments, soil and water conservation districts, planning district commissions, public museums and gardens, and nongovernmental organizations; and

WHEREAS, multiple programs and organizations have been established to deliver or support environmental education in the Commonwealth, including the Virginia Envirothon, the Virginia Association for Environmental Education, and the Virginia Resource Use Education Council; and

WHEREAS, § 46.2-749.2 of the Code of Virginia establishes special Chesapeake Bay preservation plates and requires, for each \$25 plate fee collected in excess of 1,000 registrations, \$15 to be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund for use by the Commonwealth for environmental education and restoration projects relating to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's Office of Environmental Education was established within the Department of Conservation and Recreation pursuant to § 10.1-104 of the Code of Virginia to initiate and supervise programs designed to educate citizens in ecology, pollution and its control, technology and its relationship to environmental problems, and other matters concerning environmental quality; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Environmental Education implemented or supported a wide range of programs, including a web-based environmental education clearinghouse called Virginia Naturally, Adopt-a-Stream, grants to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Virginia Association for Environmental Education, Stewardship Virginia, Environmental Education Certification, the Annual Environmental Education Data Report, the Your Backyard Classroom program, and education programs implemented through the state park system; and

WHEREAS, budget cuts enacted in 2016 resulted in the elimination of all staff positions supporting the Office of Environmental Education, an action that has resulted in the elimination, transfer, and reduction of many of its functions; and

WHEREAS, the elimination of staff support for the Office of Environmental Education provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to comprehensively evaluate the organization, funding, and staffing of environmental education so that it is delivered in the most effective and efficient manner possible; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Education be requested to study the delivery of environmental education in the Commonwealth.

In conducting their study, the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Education shall (i) inventory all public and private providers of environmental education; (ii) analyze and report on the

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59 Commonwealth's progress toward achieving the environmental education goals of the Chesapeake Bay
60 Agreement and the Standards of Learning; (iii) determine best practices for providing a consistent and
61 effective point of contact for and coordination of environmental education activities throughout the
62 Commonwealth; (iv) determine best practices for leveraging state funding for environmental education to
63 garner federal and private grant dollars; (v) consider whether the Office of Environmental Education
64 should continue to be located within the Department of Conservation and Recreation or be relocated to
65 another state agency and make recommendations based on their determination; (vi) explore the benefit of
66 establishing new public-private partnerships to assume the roles and responsibilities of the Office of
67 Environmental Education; and (vii) recommend efficiencies in the delivery of overall environmental
68 education efforts.

69 In conducting their study, the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Education shall
70 convene and consult with a committee of experts and stakeholders, including, but not limited to,
71 representatives of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Environmental
72 Quality, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Department of Education, the Virginia
73 Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Virginia Association for Environmental
74 Education, the Virginia Resource Use Education Council, the Virginia No Child Left Inside Coalition,
75 the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Chesapeake Bay Commission.

76 Technical assistance shall be provided to the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of
77 Education by each institution of higher education in the Commonwealth. All agencies of the
78 Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of
79 Education for this study, upon request.

80 The Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Education shall complete their meetings by
81 November 30, 2017, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary
82 and a report of their findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The
83 executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of
84 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the
85 first day of the 2018 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General
86 Assembly's website.