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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15

Offered January 10, 2018

Prefiled December 20, 2017

Requesting the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to study use of community gardens as a method of eliminating food deserts in the Commonwealth. Report.

Patrons—McQuinn, Adams, D.M., Aird, Bagby, Boysko, Carr, Delaney, Filler-Corn, Gooditis, Hope, Hurst, Jones, J.C., Keam, Krizek, Levine, Lindsey, Mullin, Plum, Price, Rasoul, Rodman, Simon and Tyler; Senators: Lucas and McClellan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 10.6 percent of the Commonwealth's total population, and 11.1 percent of children in the Commonwealth, live in households with earnings at or below the federal poverty level; and

WHEREAS, according to the Virginia Department of Social Services report *Poverty in Virginia*, poverty isolates people and communities from the economic and social mainstream, imposing far-reaching hardships that have significant impact on individuals, their communities, and society at large; and

WHEREAS, according to *Poverty in Virginia*, adults and children who live in poverty are likely to experience poor nutrition due in part to limited access to sources of healthy foods and options in poor communities; and

WHEREAS, adults and children who experience poor nutrition are more likely to experience negative health consequences, including obesity, chronic diseases and other debilitating health conditions, higher morbidity rates, and escalating health care costs; and

WHEREAS, although Virginia has made great strides in assisting impoverished citizens and communities, attempting to mitigate the impact of poverty, promoting good nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and educating citizens concerning the many negative consequences of obesity for the individual and the community, Virginia ranked twenty-second nationally for obesity in 2016, with 29 percent of the adult population and 27.2 of children between the ages of 10 and 17 determined to be obese; and

WHEREAS, many communities in the poorest areas of Virginia can be classified as "food deserts," areas devoid of access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other food products and staples necessary for a healthy diet; and

WHEREAS, many poor citizens live far from supermarkets and large grocery stores and do not have easy access to transportation to travel outside of their communities to purchase affordable healthy foods; and

WHEREAS, around the state and in the nation, citizens, community organizations, and local businesses are promoting, advocating, and striving creatively to end food deserts to assist and encourage poor citizens and impoverished communities in their effort to access affordable healthy food; and

WHEREAS, notable local initiatives, such as Lynchburg Grows, an urban farming program, and Richmond's 31st Street Baptist Church community garden, as well as national urban farming projects that include Will Allen's Milwaukee, Chicago Growing Power, and the District of Columbia's healthy corner stores portend possible strategies to eliminate food deserts; and

WHEREAS, creating innovative ways and opportunities to make affordable healthy foods available and accessible to poor citizens and their families, including development of community gardens, may help to improve health outcomes, increase economic productivity, lower morbidity and mortality rates, reduce disease and chronic health conditions, lessen the need for certain costly health and social services, and control exorbitant and spiraling health care costs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Secretary of Health and Human Resources be requested to study the use of community gardens as a method of eliminating food deserts in the Commonwealth. In conducting this study, the Secretary shall (i) examine options for increasing access to healthy and affordable food products for low-income and poor citizens and impoverished communities throughout the Commonwealth and (ii) evaluate the benefits of and barriers to use of community gardens as an option for increasing access to healthy and affordable food products for low-income and poor citizens and impoverished communities throughout the Commonwealth and develop recommendations for overcoming such barriers.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Secretary of Health and Human

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57 Resources for this study, upon request.

58 The Secretary shall complete his meetings by November 30, 2018, and shall submit to the Governor
59 and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of his findings and recommendations for
60 publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as
61 provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of
62 legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2019 Regular Session of the General
63 Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.