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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 309
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
(Proposed by the House Committee on Rules
on February 18, 2019)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator DeSteph)

Requesting the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to study the feasibility of creating protection zones for submerged fiber optic cables located along Virginia's shores. Report.

WHEREAS, submerged cables are any kind of fiber optic and electrical cables that are laid under and on the seabed; and

WHEREAS, submerged fiber optic cables are an important component of the national communications infrastructure of the Commonwealth and the United States, carrying the vast majority of the country's international voice and data traffic, and provide a vital link between the United States and the rest of the world; and

WHEREAS, due to their nature and location under and on the seabed, submerged fiber optic cables are susceptible to damage from certain activities, such as the anchoring of large vessels, some types of fishing, the dumping of materials, dredging, and minerals exploration; and

WHEREAS, submerged fiber optic cables off of Virginia's shores are particularly susceptible to unintended damage from the variety of activities that occur in these areas, ranging from recreational to commercial; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission is charged with the responsibility of permitting specified uses in or over state-owned submerged lands; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to develop a strategy for concentrating the efforts and resources of state and federal agencies to assess the feasibility of establishing a submerged fiber optic cable protection zone to restrict activities that have the potential to damage submerged fiber optic cables and to assist with the planning of cable placement and protection; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Virginia Marine Resources Commission be requested to study the feasibility of creating protection zones for submerged fiber optic cables located along or being developed on Virginia's shores.

In conducting its study, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission shall bring together interested parties at the state level as well as request the participation of relevant federal agencies to assess the feasibility of establishing a cable protection zone for submerged fiber optic cables located along Virginia's shores.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission by the State Corporation Commission and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission for this study, upon request.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2019, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. 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 no later than the first day of the 2020 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.