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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 146

Offered January 22, 1996

Requesting a joint subcommittee to study the propriety of paying prisoners for work.

Patron—Griffith

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the General Assembly and the citizens of the Commonwealth are concerned about the high and increasing cost of operating Virginia's corrections system; and

WHEREAS, the average annual cost of maintaining an adult prisoner in the state system of corrections is in excess of twenty thousand dollars; and

WHEREAS, the rate at which crimes against persons and property are committed in this Commonwealth is steadily rising; and

WHEREAS, under current sentencing policies, it is exceedingly difficult to reconcile the desire of the people for stricter enforcement of the law and greater certainty of punishment with the economic resources available to the Commonwealth for the construction and operation of new prison facilities; and

WHEREAS, while it has been shown that work and educational opportunities can contribute to the rehabilitation of the inmate by providing him with work training and experience, the Commonwealth may need to re-examine its policy of paying inmates for their work, either inside or outside the confines of the correctional facility, especially in light of how employment could previously be tied to good conduct time and parole; and

WHEREAS, inmates have been confined for the purposes of paying a debt to society, and this debt could be alleviated by providing labor in some form which can contribute to the operation of the correctional system, thereby reducing some of the costs of confinement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study the propriety of paying inmates in state correctional facilities for their labor. The joint subcommittee shall examine, but not be limited to, the following issues: (i) the impact of state and federal laws governing treatment of prisoners; (ii) the process and structure of work programs in other states; (iii) the impact which the laws governing deductions from inmates' wages to pay for support orders, fines and restitution, and the cost of their keep has had on the welfare of inmate families and the restitution to courts; (iv) how work can be used for true rehabilitation and work experience training and the effect of removal of wages earned for work; (v) how the facilities would substitute programs to take the place of work release and other programs which would be affected; and (vi) the effect on the morale and how this would affect control in the facilities.

The joint subcommittee shall be composed of seven members in the following manner: four shall be members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker; and three shall be members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections. The Secretary of Public Safety and the Director of the Department of Corrections shall serve as ex-officio members without vote.

The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$5,250.

The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee, upon request.

The joint subcommittee shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1997 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for processing legislative documents.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the study.

INTRODUCED

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