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## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 591

Offered January 20, 1999

*Requesting the Executive Secretary of the Virginia Supreme Court to develop and disseminate information on certain custody and visitation issues to Virginia's circuit court and district court judges and commissioners in chancery and to convene an advisory committee to develop model curricula for parent education seminars.*

Patrons—Reid, Bryant, Cantor, Hamilton, Jackson, Jones, J.C. and McDonnell; Senators: Forbes and Miller, Y.B.

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the number of custody and visitation cases heard in Virginia's district court system grew by 14.5 percent in 1997 to a total of 16,280 cases; and

WHEREAS, the impact of divorce and separation on children is partially determined by the degree to which both parents can maintain on-going involvement in the care and nurturance of their children with a minimum of hostility expressed towards each other; and

WHEREAS, the use of mediation as opposed to litigation to resolve custody and visitation disputes helps parents maintain control in making arrangements for their children's care and nurturance in a less adversarial setting; and

WHEREAS, the Code of Virginia provides for the court ordering of attendance at parent education seminars to inform parents of the impact of divorce on children; and

WHEREAS, Virginia, like the rest of the nation, has experienced growth in parent education seminars; and

WHEREAS, clinical research has supported the importance of frequent and continuing contact of children of divorce with both parents after the dissolution of the parent's relationship; and

WHEREAS, the denial of visitation to the non-custodial parent without good cause has a negative impact on the child; and

WHEREAS, custody and visitation determinations are made by circuit court and district court judges as well as commissioners in chancery across the state of Virginia, each with varying degrees of familiarity with the existence and importance of parent education seminars, alternatives to litigation, and the importance of frequent and continuing contact with each parent after dissolution of the parent's marriage; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Executive Secretary of the Virginia Supreme Court be requested to develop and disseminate information on certain custody and visitation issues to Virginia's circuit and district court judges and commissioners in chancery. Such information shall include (i) the goals and availability of parent education material, (ii) the role of mediation in custody and visitation cases, and (iii) the impact of denied visitation on children; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Executive Secretary of the Virginia Supreme Court be requested to convene an advisory committee to develop model curricula for parent education seminars. In selecting members to serve on the advisory committee, the Executive Secretary shall include a diverse representation of litigants involved in custody proceedings as well as providers of parent education seminars and experts on child development. The advisory committee shall submit its proposal for the model curricula to the Executive Secretary.

The Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court shall report on the advisory committee's proposal and any of his findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

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