

991441758

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 423
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
(Proposed by the House Committee on Rules
on February 22, 1999)

(Patrons Prior to Substitute—Senators Whipple and Hawkins [SJR 337])

Directing the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and the House Committee on Privileges and Elections to continue their joint subcommittee studying election laws innovations, improved methods to inform voters about ballot issues and candidates, and developments in Virginia's voter registration and election processes.

WHEREAS, 1998 Senate Joint Resolution 79 requested the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and the House Committee on Privileges and Elections to study election laws innovations and other matters, and the Committees established a joint subcommittee to implement Senate Joint Resolution 79; and

WHEREAS, that joint subcommittee has examined innovations in election procedures such as voting by mail, early voting, and on-request absentee voting; has recommended expanded absentee voting opportunities; and has found that a number of new voting techniques are in the early stages of development and warrant further monitoring to determine their impact on the election process; and

WHEREAS, low voter turnout statistics highlight the need to continue the search for improvements in voting procedures, the election process, and ways to stimulate voter participation, including better ways to inform the electorate about the issues and candidates on the ballot, particularly the constitutional amendments submitted to the voters for approval or rejection; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth now provides only minimal information to the public about pending constitutional amendments by methods arcane and inadequate: first, by requiring the Clerk of the House of Delegates to send two copies of each proposed amendment to the clerks of the circuit courts who must post one copy on the front door of the courthouse and hold one copy for inspection by the public; and second, by requiring the preparation and limited distribution of a neutral explanation of proposed amendments during the 90 days before the voter referendum on the amendment; and

WHEREAS, the importance of providing information on the content and impact of proposed constitutional amendments and improvements in communications technology make it timely and appropriate to examine ways to educate the public about pending constitutional amendments; and

WHEREAS, in related developments within the Commonwealth in 1998, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission conducted a review of the State Board of Elections and recommended a number of changes to improve the operations of the State Board and the Commonwealth's voter registration and election system, and the results of the Commission's review and the implementation of its recommendations merit continued review by the legislature; and

WHEREAS, a committee established by the State Board of Elections has reported recommendations for the replacement of the current Virginia Voter Registration System (VVRS), including the migration of the VVRS to a database format compatible with information industry standards, an upgrading of the communications network used by the State Board and voter registrars, and follow-up work by a technical committee to examine software, database controls, and registrar training requirements for a new system; and

WHEREAS, these developments nationwide and within the Commonwealth promise new opportunities to improve the registration and election process; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and the House Committee on Privileges and Elections be directed to continue their joint subcommittee studying election laws innovations, improved methods to inform voters about ballot issues and candidates, and developments in Virginia's voter registration and election processes. In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall also consider the issues raised in Senate Joint Resolution No. 337 (1999). The members appointed by the Committees and participating with the joint subcommittee pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 79 shall continue to serve. Any vacancies of Senate members shall be filled by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and any vacancies of House members shall be filled by the Speaker of the House in accordance with the principles of Rule 16 of the Rules of the House of Delegates.

Staffing shall continue to be provided by the Division of Legislative Services. Technical assistance shall be provided by the State Board of Elections. 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 Committees and 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

60 documents.