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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 619

Offered January 9, 2013

Prefiled January 7, 2013

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study all state-supported early childhood programs. Report.

Patron—Jones

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, preschool education is the foundation of the formal education of children and the development of requisite skills and knowledge that will dramatically impact lifelong learning and a child's success throughout the educational continuum; and

WHEREAS, preschool children are expected to have learned such basics as color identification, shapes and numbers, and the alphabet before they start kindergarten and to possess confidence, self-esteem, and certain skill sets and personal qualities that have been nurtured by parents to help make them eager and engaged learners; and

WHEREAS, preschool education provides students, particularly at-risk, disabled, and English as a second language students, an important edge in a competitive, global educational climate; and students who are not exposed to preschool education lag behind students who were enrolled in a formal preschool education program; and

WHEREAS, although the terms are often used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference between child care and preschool, and increasing evidence supports the benefits of quality preschool programs where children's socialization skills are strengthened and they explore the world through play and discover they are capable of decision making; and

WHEREAS, many states offer a variety of preschool programs, including Head Start, and public and private early childhood programs for four-year-olds and at-risk students; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Preschool Initiative, created in 1994, was strengthened and expanded in 1995 to serve all of Virginia's at-risk four-year-olds who were not being served by Head Start, and research demonstrates that public investment in high quality preschool programs can have long-term benefits for preparing students for formal education and success in later life; and

WHEREAS, although the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission studied the implementation and impact of the Virginia Preschool Initiative in 2007, and made certain recommendations to improve and strengthen the academic and social experience for students in the program, a comprehensive examination of all state-supported preschool programs in the Commonwealth has not been conducted to determine efficacy and program quality and to assess short-term and long-term measurable objectives and results; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study all state-supported early childhood programs.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) inventory and identify all state-supported preschool programs in Virginia; (ii) determine the socioeconomic status of students served by such programs and whether sufficient outreach is extended to potentially eligible students; (iii) determine where such programs are predominantly located and identify gaps in service; (iv) identify the level of parental involvement; and (v) assess whether these programs meet state requirements for academics, teacher-student ratio, and conformity with federal requirements, if any. The Commission shall also review exemplary public preschool programs in other states to ascertain best practices that may be considered for adoption in Virginia.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Education. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2013, and the Chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the 2014 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall state whether the Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor 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 and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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