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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 646

Offered January 9, 2013

Prefiled January 8, 2013

Requesting the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to explore and recommend strategies to eliminate food deserts in Virginia. Report.

Patron—McQuinn

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, according to the Virginia Department of Social Services' recent report *Poverty in Virginia*, "more than 750,000 Virginians, including 250,000 children, live in poverty and the poor are highly concentrated in inner cities and along the state's southern and southwest borders, with growing clusters in suburban areas. The current economic recession compounds the challenges, and analysts believe that the rate will increase rapidly in the next few years because of the recession, and then gradually rebound to current levels around 2022"; and

WHEREAS, the report noted further that although "Virginia has a relatively low poverty rate, ranking 10th lowest in the nation in 2010, the state's poverty rate has not decreased substantially over the last 30 years, and that the state's most vulnerable populations are children, (13.8 percent poverty rate), especially those in female-headed households, those over age 85 (27 percent poverty rate) and those with disabilities (19 percent poverty rate)"; and

WHEREAS, among the report's findings were: "(i) poverty isolates people and communities from the economic and social mainstream, and children who grow up poor face a greater likelihood of lifelong health challenges, less education, lower earnings, and are at greater risk of becoming a teen parent, repeating the cycle with their own offspring; (ii) poverty imposes far-reaching hardships, has a significant impact on individuals, those who share communities with the poor, and on society at large; (iii) children who live in poverty are likely to suffer from poor nutrition during infancy, experience emotional distress, and have an increased risk for academic failure and teenage pregnancy; (iv) adult men and women who live in poverty are at high risk of poor health and violence; and (v) poverty can also affect seniors' ability to care for themselves or to obtain prescription medication"; and

WHEREAS, due in part to limited good nutritional sources and options in poor communities, poverty frequently results in poor nutrition and obesity, which are associated with numerous diseases and debilitating health conditions, negative health outcomes, lost economic productivity, growing morbidity rates, and escalating health care costs; and

WHEREAS, although Virginia has made great strides in assisting impoverished citizens and communities, attempting to mitigate the impact of poverty, promoting good nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and educating citizens concerning the many negative consequences of obesity for the individual and the community, Virginia ranked twentieth-lowest nationally for obesity in 2010; and

WHEREAS, many citizens throughout communities in the Commonwealth, particularly the poor, seniors, and at-risk populations, have received and embraced the good nutrition and healthy lifestyle message; however, many communities in the poorest areas of Virginia can be classified as "food deserts," areas devoid of access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other food products and staples necessary for a healthy diet; and

WHEREAS, many poor citizens live far from supermarkets and large grocery stores and do not have easy access to transportation to travel outside of their communities to purchase affordable healthy foods; and

WHEREAS, around the state and in the nation, citizens, community organizations, and local businesses are promoting, advocating, and striving creatively to end food deserts to assist and encourage poor citizens and impoverished communities in their effort to access affordable healthy food; and

WHEREAS, notable local initiatives, such as Lynchburg Grows, an urban farming program, and Richmond's 31st Street Baptist Church community garden, as well as national urban farming projects that include Will Allen's Milwaukee, Chicago Growing Power, and Washington, D.C.'s healthy corner stores portend possible strategies to eliminate food deserts; and

WHEREAS, if we are what we eat, and if an apple a day will keep the doctor away, creating innovative ways and opportunities to make affordable healthy foods available and accessible to poor citizens and their families may help to improve health outcomes, increase economic productivity, lower morbidity and mortality rates, reduce disease and chronic health conditions, lessen the need for certain costly health and social services, and control exorbitant and spiraling health care costs; now, therefore, be it

INTRODUCED

HJ646

59 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Secretary of Health and
60 Human Resources be requested to explore and recommend strategies to eliminate food deserts in
61 Virginia. In conducting the study, the Secretary is also requested to examine ways to make healthy and
62 affordable food products available and accessible to low-income and poor citizens and impoverished
63 communities throughout the Commonwealth.

64 The Secretary of Health and Human Resources shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated
65 Systems an executive summary and report of his progress in meeting the request of this resolution no
66 later than the first day of the 2014 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary
67 and report shall be submitted for publication as a report document as provided in the procedures of the
68 Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and
69 shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.