

2016 SESSION

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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 121

Offered January 22, 2016

Expressing the sense of the General Assembly regarding public charter schools.

Patron—Suetterlein

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, public charter schools are tuition-free public schools that foster a relationship between parents, teachers, and students to create an environment where parents can be more involved, teachers are given the freedom to innovate, and students are provided the structure best suited for their learning; and

WHEREAS, by giving teachers the freedom to innovate and try new ways to improve student achievement, charter public schools can be more responsive and create an environment tailored to the needs of individual students, while still being held more accountable for student learning; and

WHEREAS, public charter schools are some of the top-performing schools in the country; and more than a quarter of the Best High Schools in America, according to *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*, are charter public schools, even though charter public schools make up just over six percent of the nation's public high schools; and

WHEREAS, the percentage of public charter school students who graduate from high school and are accepted at a college or university is higher than the percentage of traditional public school students who graduate from high school and are accepted at a college or university public charter schools are excelling in narrowing achievement gaps in public education for those from low-income households; and

WHEREAS, despite the existence of a public charter school law in the Commonwealth for almost 20 years, the number of public charter schools and students in Virginia lags far behind that in similarly sized states; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That it is the sense of the General Assembly that public charter schools should (i) be free and open to all students; (ii) be unable to charge tuition, teach religion, or have admissions requirements; (iii) not discriminate against any person on a basis that would be unlawful if done by a non-charter public school; (iv) be accessible throughout the Commonwealth with preference to public charter school applicants that propose to create schools to serve historically disadvantaged students; (v) be prohibited from engaging in any sectarian practices in their educational programs, admissions, employment policies, and operations; (vi) have the flexibility to innovate in areas such as scheduling, personnel, funding, and educational programs in order to improve student outcomes and academic achievement; (vii) be governed by independent governing boards subject to state open meetings and freedom of information laws; (viii) be subject to the standards, assessments, and accreditation requirements applicable to other public schools in the state; (ix) be approved only if applicants have demonstrated competence in each element of its published approval criteria and are likely to open and operate a successful public charter school, base decisions on documented evidence collected through the application review process, and follow charter-granting policies and practices that are transparent, are based on merit, and avoid conflicts of interest; (x) enter contracts with the authorizer that will include performance frameworks that clearly set forth the academic and operational performance indicators, measures, and metrics that will guide the state's evaluations of each public charter school; and xi) be nonprofit organizations; further, students attending public charter schools should be funded in an equitable and constitutional manner; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Board of Education in order that the members of the Board of Education may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter during their deliberations.

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