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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 652

Offered January 11, 2017

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Encouraging the Governor to recognize best practices to reduce the negative consequences of adverse childhood experiences in developing policies of the Commonwealth.

Patrons—Carr, Hester, McQuinn, Peace and Toscano

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, research over the last two decades in the evolving fields of neuroscience, molecular biology, public health, genomics, and epigenetics reveals that experiences in the first few years of life build changes into the biology of the human body that, in turn, influence the person's physical and mental health over his lifetime; and

WHEREAS, early experiences literally shape the physical architecture of a child's developing brain and establish either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all learning, health, and behavior that follows; and

WHEREAS, chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood caused by environmental factors such as extreme socioeconomic hardship, repeated abuse or neglect, severe maternal depression, parental substance abuse, and violence can be toxic to a child's developing brain and can lead to poor health outcomes later in life; and

WHEREAS, the landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences Study found a strong correlation between the number of adverse childhood experiences and a person's risk for diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes and negative health behaviors such as smoking or misuse of legal or illegal substances; and

WHEREAS, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study also found that a person with four or more adverse childhood experiences was 1.6 times more likely to have diabetes, 2.2 times more likely to have heart disease, and nine times more likely to have a type of cancer than the general population; and

WHEREAS, a critical factor in buffering children from the effects of toxic stress and trauma resulting from adverse child experiences is the existence of supportive, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and their families, caregivers, and other important people in their lives; and

WHEREAS, the emerging science and research on toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences has implications for the Commonwealth's educational, juvenile justice, criminal justice, social services, health, and mental health systems as well as communities across the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, all children and families benefit, regardless of trauma history, from resilience-based practices and approaches; and

WHEREAS, in the process of determining how to utilize limited resources, it is more effective and less costly to positively influence the architecture of a young child's developing brain than to attempt to correct poor learning, health, and behaviors later in life; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Governor be encouraged to recognize best practices to reduce the negative consequences of adverse childhood experiences in developing policies of the Commonwealth, take into account the principles of early childhood brain development, and, whenever possible, consider the concepts of toxic stress, early adversity, and nurturing relationships and the role of primary prevention, early intervention, and trauma-informed and resilience-building practices and policies as a means to achieving a lasting foundation for a more prosperous, healthier, and sustainable Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to the Governor, requesting that the Governor further disseminate copies of this resolution to his respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.

INTRODUCED

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