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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 51

Offered January 8, 2020

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Designating November, in 2020 and in each succeeding year, as World Prematurity Month and November 17, in 2020 and in each succeeding year, as World Prematurity Day in Virginia.

Patron—McClellan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, premature birth, also known as preterm birth, is a birth that occurs at least three weeks before a baby's due date or with less than 37 weeks' gestation; premature birth can happen to any pregnant woman and the cause is often unknown; and

WHEREAS, while most women give birth to healthy, full-term babies, premature birth is not uncommon, affecting four out of every 10 women, and can involve a high degree of emotional distress for both the woman and her family; and

WHEREAS, there are three groups of women at greatest risk of premature labor and birth: women who have had a previous premature birth, women who are pregnant with twins or higher-order multiples, and women with certain uterine or cervical abnormalities; and

WHEREAS, if a woman has any of these three risk factors, it is especially important for her to know the signs and symptoms of premature labor and what to do if they occur; and

WHEREAS, among the known lifestyle risk factors for premature birth are a woman's use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs and inadequate preconception and prenatal care, although prematurity in birth may also occur in women who have no known risk factors; and

WHEREAS, preterm babies represent the largest child patient group, and the number of preterm births continue to increase even as the total number of overall births is steadily decreasing, with approximately 15 million children born too early every year; and

WHEREAS, despite this high number and the risks involved, the public is not fully aware of the problems and risks involved in the development of a preterm infant and the need for efforts to reduce the number of preterm births; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, the rate of preterm birth in the United States rose to 9.93 percent, one of the highest rates of premature birth in the developed world, with Virginia slightly below the national average at 9.6 percent; and

WHEREAS, although babies may survive preterm birth, some may require special medical care requiring weeks or months of hospitalization, and often these babies face adverse health conditions over the course of their lives, such as chronic respiratory problems, cerebral palsy, vision and hearing loss, feeding and digestive problems, sensory and motor deficits, infections, cardiovascular diseases, or diabetes, and higher risk of learning, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities compared to their full-term counterparts; and

WHEREAS, in the United States, the annual cost of these serious health consequences is estimated to be more than \$26 billion, and although doctors have made exceptional progress in the care of preterm babies, more research is needed to increase the medical community's understanding of the risk factors for premature birth; and

WHEREAS, researchers agree that better screening tests need to be developed to identify women likely to give birth early, as well as treatments that can be used in advance to interrupt the cascade of events leading to prematurity; and

WHEREAS, World Prematurity Day, established by the March of Dimes, provides an opportunity to raise awareness about premature birth throughout the Commonwealth and the United States and to promote efforts to support women and families dealing with premature birth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly designate November, in 2020 and in each succeeding year, as World Prematurity Month and November 17, in 2020 and in each succeeding year, as World Prematurity Day in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the March of Dimes so that members of the organization may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate post the designation of this month and this day on the General Assembly's website.

INTRODUCED

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