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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 241

Offered January 11, 2023

Prefiled January 9, 2023

*Requesting the Office of the Children's Ombudsman to continue its study of legal representation in child dependency cases. Report.*

Patron—Edwards

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the third enactment of Chapter 305 of the Acts of Assembly of 2022 directed the Office of the Children's Ombudsman to convene a work group to consider issues relating to the Commonwealth's model of court-appointed legal counsel in child dependency cases and to make recommendations for legislative and budgetary changes to address such issues; and

WHEREAS, the work group convened by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman met eight times in 2022 and identified key issues relating to the appointment of legal counsel in child dependency cases, including compensation, standards, training, accountability, and workforce challenges; and

WHEREAS, the work group convened by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman made recommendations for legislative and budgetary changes to address such key issues to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and the House Committee for Courts of Justice in a report dated November 1, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the work group convened by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman reported that, if implemented, such recommendations would require additional action, including the development of qualification and performance standards for attorneys appointed as counsel for parents and the appropriation of funds for the establishment of a pilot program for multidisciplinary offices staffed by attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates to serve diverse jurisdictions in the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Office of the Children's Ombudsman be requested to continue its study of legal representation in child dependency cases.

In conducting its study, the Office of the Children's Ombudsman shall direct the work group convened pursuant to Chapter 305 of the Acts of Assembly of 2022 to continue its work regarding the implementation of the recommendations made in its November 1, 2022, report.

The work group shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2023, and shall submit to the Governor and General Assembly an executive summary and 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 no later than the first day of the 2024 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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