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HOUSE BILL NO. 538**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**

(Proposed by the House Committee on Education

on January 31, 2024)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Cole)

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 10.1 a section numbered 10.1-104.6:3, relating to Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund and Program established.*

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 10.1 a section numbered 10.1-104.6:3 as follows:

§ 10.1-104.6:3. Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund and Program.

A. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund, referred to in this section as "the Fund." The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. All funds appropriated for such purpose and any gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds received on its behalf shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purpose of awarding grants on a competitive basis pursuant to the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Program established in subsection B. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director.

B. There is hereby established the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Program (the Program) for the purpose of awarding grants from the Fund on a competitive basis to any school division that seeks assistance to initiate, expand, or improve teacher professional development opportunities or student environmental education programs that align with the content and objectives of this section. The Office of Environmental Education shall, in consultation with the Department of Education and any other stakeholder that it deems appropriate, administer the Fund and Program and shall establish such rules and procedures for the Program that it deems necessary and appropriate.

C. Any school division may apply for Program grants for teacher professional development opportunities or student environmental education programs and may develop local student environmental literacy plans that align with the Standards of Learning and emphasize environmental literacy as an essential skill and concept of citizenship that is necessary for responsible participation in American society and in the international community, as set forth in subsection C of § 22.1-253.13:1. Such local student environmental literacy plans may also prepare students to understand, analyze, and address the major environmental challenges facing the Commonwealth and the United States and may:

1. Provide field experiences as part of regular school curricula and create programs that contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition; and

2. Create opportunities for the enhanced and ongoing professional development of teachers relating to environmental issues.