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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 12

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 4, 2024

*Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the impact of utility-scale solar development in the Commonwealth on agriculture, forestry, and the environment. Report.*

Patron—Orrock

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's goals for energy production include developing the energy resources necessary to produce 30 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030 and 100 percent of its electricity from carbon-free sources by 2040; and

WHEREAS, on the scale of a utility power plant, solar panel installation can require five to 10 acres per megawatt of power generation capacity; and

WHEREAS, agriculture and forestry are the Commonwealth's largest private industries, with a combined annual economic impact of over \$105 billion, and the health of these industries affects communities around the Commonwealth, especially in rural areas; and

WHEREAS, a central priority of the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry is to retain over 23 million acres of forest and farmland in the Commonwealth, which stands to benefit landowners, local communities, and the environment; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study the impact of utility-scale solar development in the Commonwealth on agriculture, forestry, and the environment.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) collect data pertaining to (a) the size, output, and environmental requirements and impacts of solar projects in the Commonwealth that have been completed or the construction of which has been initiated; (b) land availability in the Commonwealth for the placement of new solar projects; and (c) the impact of utility-scale solar development in the Commonwealth on agriculture, forestry, and the environment; and (ii) provide recommendations for how the Commonwealth can meet its goals pertaining to renewable energy production while minimizing the negative impact of solar energy expansion on agriculture, forestry, and the environment.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Forestry. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2025, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the 2026 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall state whether the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor 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 and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.