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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 61

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 10, 2024

Requesting the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to study the feasibility of implementing the option for students to pay \$10,000 annually for tuition and mandatory fees to earn a degree at a baccalaureate public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth. Report.

Patron—Runion

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, "Preparing for the Top Jobs of the 21st Century: The Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011" set a goal for public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth of conferring approximately 100,000 cumulative additional undergraduate degrees on Virginians between 2011 and 2025; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to House Joint Resolution 108 (2012), the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission studied the cost efficiency of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth and identified opportunities to reduce the cost of public higher education in the Commonwealth in its November 2014 report, *Addressing the Cost of Public Higher Education in Virginia*; and

WHEREAS, despite the recommendations contained in such report, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission reported in its *State Spending: 2023 Update* that tuition at baccalaureate public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth increased at an average annual rate of 4.4 percent between the 2014 fiscal year and the 2023 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission also reported in its *State Spending: 2023 Update* that the average tuition at baccalaureate public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth was \$14,649 in the 2023 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, the increasing costs of higher education have forced many students to incur significant debt in order to complete their degrees, with The Institute for College Access and Success reporting that the average student debt for 2020 graduates of baccalaureate institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth was \$29,616 and that 55 percent of such students graduated with debt related to their higher education; and

WHEREAS, the increasing costs of higher education and the growing debt burden for students may limit access to educational opportunities, adversely affect growth in other sectors of the economy of the Commonwealth, and be an obstacle to achieving the Commonwealth's undergraduate degree conferral goal; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative to explore options for students to earn baccalaureate degrees at a lower annual cost; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia be requested to study the feasibility of implementing the option for students to pay \$10,000 annually for tuition and mandatory fees to earn a degree at a baccalaureate public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its study, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall survey each baccalaureate public institution of higher education to determine the likely impact of such an option on enrollment, revenue, costs, services, staffing, and such other factors as the institution deems relevant.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia by each baccalaureate public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia for this study, upon request.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2024, and shall submit to the Governor and the 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 2025 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.