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**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 7**

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled December 30, 2025

*Requesting the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, in collaboration with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, to study the feasibility of creating an optional service year program for high school graduates. Report.*

Patron—Helmer

Committee Referral Pending

WHEREAS, it is crucial to provide opportunities for young adults to foster a sense of community, develop a sense of purpose, identify passions and desired skills, understand the value of a strong work-ethic, and develop a broader understanding of societal differences and the impact of direct engagement within one's community; and

WHEREAS, early employment in a field of interest allows young adults to explore potential career paths, work toward financial independence, and build a network of connections, which can assist in alleviating the stress associated with finding future employment; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, Maryland established a "Service Year Option" program, which encourages volunteerism and workforce development by permitting recent high school graduates to earn competitive wages while gaining valuable skills in placements aligned with their interests and working with support coaches to develop post-service plans for further education or careers; and

WHEREAS, recent high school graduates in the Commonwealth could greatly benefit from a program that allows them to gain work experience and develop skill sets for future careers, provides such individuals with valuable knowledge and direction when choosing whether to pursue higher or vocational education or to enter the workforce, and encourages employer participation by allowing employers to cultivate the future workforce with strong training from an early age; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, in collaboration with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, be requested to study the feasibility of creating an optional service year program for high school graduates.

In conducting its study, the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement shall (i) review the Service Year Option program established in Maryland, analyze the scope and overall success of the program, and determine (a) the number of employers who have signed up to participate in the program during each year of the program's existence, whether they are public sector or private sector employers, and the variety of occupational families represented; (b) the number of recent high school graduates who have elected to participate in the program during each year of the program's existence; (c) any differences in participation numbers for both employer and employee participants based on region or locality; and (d) the overall percentage of recent high school graduate participants who successfully complete the entirety of the program each year; (ii) estimate the fiscal responsibility of the Commonwealth for start-up costs for the establishment of a similar optional service year program, including the number of additional employees needed to develop and administer a service year program, and any other potential operating costs associated with continued implementation of such a program, such as marketing costs or financial incentives toward participation and completion of a service year, that would be borne by the Commonwealth; (iii) recommend strategies to encourage public and private sector employer participation as well as strategies to incentivize recent high school graduates to enroll in such a program, taking into account (a) the potential hours required of employee participants to dedicate to their service employers and (b) the necessary time and other resources required of employer participants to provide adequate training and mentorship to employee participants within the program; (iv) analyze potential impacts on both participating employers and employees and on the Commonwealth, including societal, workforce, and financial impacts, and potential impacts on enrollment in higher education or career technical education programs; and (v) determine the feasibility of establishing a successful and enduring service year option program for recent high school graduates in the Commonwealth.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia for this study, upon request.

The Department of Workforce Development and Advancement shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2026, 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 2027 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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