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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 1, 2026

Requesting the Judicial Council of Virginia to study the organization and boundaries of the 15th Judicial Circuit. Report.

Patron—Cole, J.G.

Committee Referral Pending

WHEREAS, the 15th Judicial Circuit is a geographically large judicial circuit in the Commonwealth and includes the City of Fredericksburg and Caroline, Essex, Hanover, King George, Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland Counties; and

WHEREAS, the boundary lines of the 15th Judicial Circuit were established in 1973 following a recommendation to restructure the courts of record, and no adjustments have been made to the 15th Judicial Circuit boundary lines since that time; and

WHEREAS, following the introduction of two bills providing for a realignment of the judicial circuits in 2011, the Supreme Court of Virginia was requested to conduct a study on the judicial boundaries proposed within the bills, with the intent that the members of the General Assembly would review any recommendations or analysis provided by the Supreme Court prior to any legislative action being taken to realign the boundaries of the judicial circuits; and

WHEREAS, in the 2011 judicial boundary realignment study conducted by the study committee convened by the Supreme Court of Virginia, the committee reported population growth as a significant factor in determining what boundaries would best serve the Commonwealth in the future, and the report specified that Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties were two of the five fastest-growing counties in terms of population, experiencing 424.5 percent and 645.2 percent growth, respectively; and

WHEREAS, for such study, judges and clerks were surveyed as to the most important factors in determining judicial boundary lines, and both judges and clerks agreed that the number of new cases per judge, the number of hearings per judge, and the travel time between courthouses were the top three most important factors, with judges reportedly considering total time spent on the bench and the geography of the circuit the fourth and fifth most important factors to consider; and

WHEREAS, between 1980 and 2010 the 15th Judicial Circuit saw the greatest increase in caseloads of all circuits in the Commonwealth, and current caseload data has continued to demonstrate large caseloads in certain localities overseen by the judges in the 15th Judicial Circuit; and

WHEREAS, the Study Committee emphasized in the 2011 report that weighted caseload data would be critical in determining judicial boundary lines that provide for the most efficient allocation of judicial resources, and the National Center for State Courts has since conducted three weighted caseload studies and submitted corresponding reports to the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fredericksburg and Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties have continued to experience population growth along with increases in businesses and infrastructure, leading to busier dockets in these localities and creating additional challenges when assigning dockets to ensure adequate coverage of caseloads, but also resulting in sitting judges needing to travel significant distances between their residences and courthouses or between multiple courthouses on a single day where dockets must be heard in different locations; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary for the Judicial Council of Virginia to periodically conduct studies to ensure that the boundaries of the judicial circuits in the Commonwealth are drawn to efficiently and fairly distribute judicial resources and provide the citizens of the cities and counties within a circuit meaningful access to the courts; and

WHEREAS, subsection B of § 17.1-507 of the Code of Virginia requires the Judicial Council to conduct a study before any boundary lines are amended by the General Assembly; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Judicial Council of Virginia be requested to study the organization and boundaries of the 15th Judicial Circuit.

In conducting its study, the Judicial Council of Virginia (the Council) shall (i) review current caseload data, population data, other relevant data, and all calculations and recommendations provided in the three judicial workload studies conducted by the National Center for State Courts and submitted to the General Assembly to assess caseloads for localities within the 15th Judicial Circuit and evaluate judicial need in each of the localities within the circuit; (ii) evaluate current court management practices and judicial court assignments and provide an analysis of the impact of such practices and assignments on the overall efficiency of the courts and judges; (iii) consider the geography of the circuit and time spent traveling between

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59 courthouses within the 15th Judicial Circuit and identify any impacts on judges or court participants due to
60 the size of the circuit; (iv) analyze the composition of localities currently included in the 15th Judicial Circuit
61 as compared to other circuits in the Commonwealth to determine whether the 15th Circuit is an outlier in
62 having multiple localities with significant population growth and higher caseloads paired with more rural
63 localities and lower caseloads; and (v) determine if the citizens of the 15th Judicial Circuit would be better
64 served by removing the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties from the current
65 boundary lines of the 15th Judicial Circuit and establishing a new judicial circuit composed of those
66 localities. If the removal of the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties from the
67 current boundary lines of the 15th Judicial Circuit and establishment of a new judicial circuit composed of
68 those localities is not recommended, the Council shall provide suggestions to ease burdens on judges in the
69 15th Judicial Circuit and specify any additional resources or support that the Office of the Executive
70 Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia may be able to provide.

71 Technical assistance shall be provided to the Council by the Office of the Executive Secretary of the
72 Supreme Court of Virginia. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Council for
73 this study, upon request. The Council shall further solicit input from the circuit court judges of the 15th
74 Judicial Circuit, court clerks employed in courthouses located within the 15th Judicial Circuit, and attorneys
75 who regularly appear as counsel in cases heard in circuit courts of the 15th Judicial Circuit.

76 The Council shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2026, and shall submit to the Governor and the
77 General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as
78 a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the
79 procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and
80 reports no later than the first day of the 2027 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on
81 the General Assembly's website.