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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 27

Offered January 14, 2026

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study options to improve the affordability of higher education for students in the Commonwealth. Report.

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Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, 23 associate-degree-granting public institutions of higher education operate under the Virginia Community College System on 40 campuses across the Commonwealth and offer associate degrees, certifications, and workforce training to more than 235,000 students annually, and the average cost of attendance at such institutions, including tuition and mandatory fees, is \$5,049 for the 2025–2026 academic year; and

WHEREAS, 15 baccalaureate public institutions of higher education operate in the Commonwealth, and the average cost of attendance, including tuition, mandatory fees, and room and board, is \$29,538 for the 2025–2026 academic year; and

WHEREAS, a 2023 study conducted by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) focused on methods to determine appropriate funding levels and operating budgets for public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth, and studies conducted by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) in 2014 and 2023 offered certain insights into drivers of higher education costs and some recommendations to address the affordability of higher education by students and families; and

WHEREAS, as provided in § 23.1-307 of the Code of Virginia and as additionally required by the general appropriation act, SCHEV is directed to report annually to the General Assembly and to the Governor on any increase in undergraduate tuition and mandatory fees at any public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth; such annual report also includes trends over time and a comparison of higher education costs in the Commonwealth to those of other states and offers suggestions for more affordable options that students may choose to reduce costs; and

WHEREAS, SCHEV's 2025 annual report concluded that the total costs of attendance at baccalaureate public institutions of higher education increased by 3.1 percent from the 2024–2025 academic year and that the Commonwealth will cover 58 percent of such educational costs while students and their families assume the other 42 percent, falling below the Commonwealth's cost-share policy of covering 67 percent of such educational costs; and

WHEREAS, a comprehensive study focused solely on improving the affordability of higher education for residents of the Commonwealth is necessary, given inflation in recent years, in addition to recent changes to federal funding for higher education and new lower limits on federal loans; such a study can help to ensure students are able to pursue degrees without fear of crushing debt post-graduation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be requested to study options to improve the affordability of higher education for students in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its study, JLARC shall (i) evaluate the impact of federal funding losses on overall budgets for public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth and determine the potential amount of state funding necessary to compensate for such losses in order to prevent such institutions from passing the costs of such losses on to enrolled students; (ii) evaluate immediate and further reaching potential impacts of federal loan caps on higher education affordability, including possible increases in the number of students applying for private loans with larger interest rates or a future reduction in the number of students capable of pursuing career paths requiring baccalaureate or graduate degrees due to the inability to afford costs upfront; (iii) identify the total amount of funds necessary to meet the Commonwealth's cost-share policy threshold of covering 67 percent of educational costs for students attending such institutions and provide recommendations of funding sources to reach such cost-share policy threshold; (iv) determine if such institutions have implemented any previously recommended affordability measures and evaluate options for further reducing the costs of attending such institutions, including (a) requiring such institutions to regularly evaluate enrollment and staffing ratios, evaluate the number of unused or under-utilized facilities, and streamline operations based on the results of such evaluations; (b) reducing the share of athletic costs passed along to students as mandatory fees by placing an additional statutory cap on student fees and institutional funds for athletics; (c) reallocating funds to provide additional grants for low-income and middle-income students with financial need; (d) considering additional freezes on tuition increases; (e) increasing grants or other financial assistance offered to students transferring from an associate-degree-granting public institution of higher education to a baccalaureate public institution of higher education, and eliminating redundancies in

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59 coursework requirements or ensuring a guaranteed transfer of credits for similar courses previously
60 completed; and (f) offering grants or financial assistance to students for housing or meal costs; (v) investigate
61 whether per-student funding is an outdated funding model for sustaining such institutions; (vi) evaluate the
62 impacts of cuts to external research funding for such institutions on costs that are passed along to students if
63 such institutions must resort to the self-funding of research projects; (vii) provide updated recommendations
64 for any statutory amendments needed to improve the affordability of higher education by students and
65 families in the Commonwealth; and (viii) estimate the cost to the Commonwealth to provide free in-state
66 tuition to all enrolled students who are residents of the Commonwealth, where the cost of such free in-state
67 tuition would be borne by the Commonwealth for (a) students of low-income families with in-state residency
68 beginning in the 2036–2037 academic year and (b) an annually increasing percentage of enrolled students
69 with in-state residency until the 2046–2047 academic year, by which year all enrolled students with in-state
70 residency would receive free in-state tuition.

71 All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to JLARC for this study, upon request.

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