

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 668

Requesting the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to study the rising costs of college textbooks and textbook purchasing practices of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth. Report.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 25, 2005
Agreed to by the Senate, February 24, 2005

WHEREAS, a college education—whether vocational or technical, undergraduate, graduate, or professional—provides certain benefits, among them increased knowledge and skills, employability, higher earning power, career advancement, and a better quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the costs of higher education have continued to escalate and, according to recently released reports from the College Board, "most students and their families can expect to pay, on average, from \$167 to \$1,132 more than last year for this year's tuition and fees, depending on the type of college"; and

WHEREAS, after tuition, the largest out-of-pocket costs most families expect to pay are room and board, however, most students and parents must recover from "sticker shock" when presented with the bill for mandatory textbooks; and

WHEREAS, the cost of textbooks has risen over 230 percent since the 1980s, a rate five times faster than other consumer goods, and the National Retail Federation stated that "nationally, students and their parents will spend \$8.8 billion on textbooks this year"; the College Board estimates that "the price of mandatory textbook purchases and necessary supplies for college students has risen to \$817 nationally"; and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Producer Price Index data suggests that wholesale prices of college textbooks have risen approximately 40 percent in the past seven years; and

WHEREAS, college students, faculty, parents, and policymakers have voiced concerns and have started investigations into the high costs of college textbooks, and the United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness held hearings on the costs of college textbooks on July 20, 2004; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee cited the report, "RIPOFF 101 — How the Current Practices of the Textbook Industry Drive Up the Cost of College Textbooks," stating that "textbook publishers add bells and whistles that drive up the costs of textbooks, and new editions are flooding the market but contain minimal if any substantive changes"; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee noted further that, "according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the wholesale price of college textbooks has increased approximately 40 percent since 1998, and that according to the National Association of College Stores of the 75.9 cents of every dollar that students pay for new textbooks that go to the publishers, 11.5 cents is sent to the authors of the textbooks, leaving 64.4 cents out of every dollar to be retained by the publishers"; and

WHEREAS, the United States General Accounting Office has been directed to investigate textbook pricing practices, including disparity in textbook prices between the United States and other countries, price disparity between new and old textbooks, and publishing companies' practices of printing new editions; and

WHEREAS, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia has reported that students can save an average of 25 percent by purchasing used textbooks; however, faculty education is a vital component of any system to increase the availability of used textbooks and to reduce costs of new books to students; and

WHEREAS, college book stores are auxiliary enterprises of Virginia's public institutions of higher education and do not receive state general fund tax dollars; and

WHEREAS, some states and institutions of higher education are exploring alternatives to lessen the financial burden of the costs of textbooks for students and their families, such as textbook rental systems, digital textbook subscriptions, used textbooks, faculty enlightenment on the costs of requiring new and multiple textbooks for college courses, rules for professors and college bookstores, sales tax exemption on college textbooks, adoption of standard core curriculum textbooks, textbook financing and low interest loans for textbooks programs; and

WHEREAS, in June 2004, the Virginia Community College System Textbook Task Force identified possible strategies and recommendations to reduce textbook costs, and the dissemination of information concerning best practices for purchasing textbooks to institutions of higher education and the development of alternatives to reduce textbook costs for students and their families, while preserving educational quality and integrity, that would help make college more affordable for many students and lessen their financial indebtedness upon graduation; now, therefore, be it

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RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia be requested to study the rising costs of college textbooks and textbook purchasing practices of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its study, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall (i) conduct a sample survey of public and private college students in Virginia regarding the costs of textbooks each semester; (ii) review and analyze the textbook purchasing policies of public institutions of higher education and develop and disseminate best practices for textbook purchasing; and (iii) review unique laws and alternatives being considered or that have been implemented by institutions of higher education in Virginia and other states to reduce the financial burden of textbook costs to students and their families, including, but not limited to, used textbooks, rental textbook systems, digital textbook subscriptions, textbook financing programs, faculty education and rules for professors and college bookstores.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia by the Virginia Community College System, the General and Professional Advisory Committee to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the staffs of the House Committee on Appropriations and Senate Committee on Finance. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the State Council for this study, upon request.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2005, 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 2006 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.