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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 772

Offered January 17, 2003

Commending the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on its contributions to racial equality and recognition of the 140th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Patron—Christian

WHEREAS, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a national nonviolent and social change organization, was founded in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after the bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 and 1956; and

WHEREAS, the SCLC, composed initially of African-American churches and ministers, formed the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement and the successful nonviolent mass action and protests against segregation in the United States; and

WHEREAS, working tirelessly with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the African-American community, and Americans of conscience, the SCLC developed legal and nonviolent direct action strategies that succeeded in battles against segregation to foster social justice for African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, the people of this great nation—presidents and janitors, black and white, male and female, young and old, citizens and immigrants—have been and are the beneficiaries of the sacrifices and perseverance of the members of this outstanding organization committed to ensuring freedom, justice, equality, and dignity for all persons; and

WHEREAS, the SCLC's success can be attributed to its visionary and charismatic leaders, including Dr. King, Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy, Reverend Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, and Martin Luther King, III, who were assisted by other activists such as Ms. Ella Baker, former Ambassador Andrew Young, and Reverend Jesse Jackson; and

WHEREAS, SCLC's significance to the Civil Rights Movement centered on a series of highly publicized protest campaigns in the early 1960s and demonstrations that resulted in attacks by dogs and high-pressure water hoses against the marchers, culminating on August 28, 1963, with the March on Washington, where more than 200,000 people gathered in the nation's capital to show their support for civil rights for blacks and to hear King's speech, "I Have a Dream," which summarized his vision of the goals of the civil rights movement; and

WHEREAS, the events in Birmingham and Washington, D.C., galvanized support for national legislation against segregation, which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing racial discrimination throughout the land; and

WHEREAS, on March 7, 1965, the SCLC participated in a protest march in the struggle for African-American voting rights in Selma, Alabama, in which peaceful marchers were brutally attacked, beaten, and tear-gassed, and this horrific event, known as "Bloody Sunday," sent shockwaves around the nation and created support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, ending decades of literacy and voter qualification tests, and other illegal barriers to prevent African-Americans from voting; and

WHEREAS, the SCLC broadened its civil rights agenda after 1965 to include economic justice and to end housing and employment discrimination; and Dr. King, prior to his death in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, conceived and planned the Poor People's Campaign, to address the relationship between poverty and urban violence, in support of striking African-American garbage workers; and

WHEREAS, dedicated to promoting human rights throughout the United States and abroad and improving the quality of life for all people, the SCLC opposed apartheid in South Africa and has remained active in the fight for greater economic opportunity for the poor, and against racial injustice and efforts to limit civil rights; and

WHEREAS, it is generally believed that American slavery ended on January 1, 1863, upon the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln, and the anniversary of this date has been celebrated by African-Americans ever since, although slavery was not legally abolished until the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on December 18, 1865; and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 2003, the SCLC and its chapters throughout the nation will commemorate the 140th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation with convocations, decorous ceremonies, communitywide programs, and reflections on the history and experience of African-Americans in the United States and the significance and implications of freedom to restoring the ethos of the African-American people for survival today and in future generations; and

WHEREAS, calling African-Americans and the nation to recognize and commemorate this moment in American history may invoke in all people an appreciation of the sacrifices of our forebears, empathy

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59 for the struggles of others who yearn to be free, and gratitude for the blessings of liberty and freedom
60 that this Commonwealth and the nation hold dear; now, therefore, be it

61 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
62 commend the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on its contributions to racial equality and
63 recognition of the 140th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation; and, be it

64 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
65 for presentation to Martin Luther King, III, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference,
66 and to the president of the Virginia State Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference so
67 that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly in this matter.