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## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 204

Offered February 25, 2004

*Commending Ruby Nell Bridges.*

Patron—Marsh

WHEREAS, Ruby Nell Bridges was born in Mississippi in 1954, the year in which the United States Supreme Court ruled the doctrine "separate but equal" unconstitutional in the landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*; and

WHEREAS, this decision brought revolutionary changes to the social and political order in the United States, and declared an end to segregated public schools across the land; and

WHEREAS, while a small child, Ruby Bridges' family moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, in search of better employment and educational opportunities; and

WHEREAS, in the spring of 1960, she was tested along with other African-American children to determine which of them would integrate the city's public school system; and

WHEREAS, on November 14, 1960, escorted by federal marshals through a gauntlet of verbally abusive, hostile, and fervent opponents of desegregation, she became the first African-American child to desegregate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, the only African-American kindergartner at William Franz Elementary School, Ruby Bridges was taught separately in a classroom apart from other students in the school, and her brave march into school each day surrounded by a militant mob of segregationists attracted local and national attention; and

WHEREAS, although many White parents defiantly pulled their children from the school in protest to her attendance, Ruby Bridges went to school every day protected by federal marshals and shielded by prayer, having been taught to pray by her mother; and

WHEREAS, her family was besieged with threats, segregationists retaliated against her father and grandparents, racially offensive epithets were hurled at her, and on one occasion a Black doll in a coffin was used to express virulent hatred for her, a mere six year old; and

WHEREAS, in spite of the hatred Ruby Bridges felt each day, she prayed daily for those who hated her, and upon recalling such perilous times as an adult, she attributed her strength and protection during the ordeal to constant prayer; and

WHEREAS, her story has been captured by the great painter Norman Rockwell in his picture "The Problem We All Live With," and by Dr. Robert Coles, noted child psychiatrist and Harvard professor, in his treatise, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*; and

WHEREAS, Ruby Bridges has published her experience in *Through My Eyes*, and speaks and lectures throughout the nation to instill her message of appreciation of all races, and to promote and encourage tolerance, respect, and appreciation of diversity through educational programs; and

WHEREAS, with the belief that prejudice and racism can be eliminated and society changed through the education and inspiration of children, Ruby Bridges delivered her message of racial unity, tolerance, respect, and appreciation of diversity to the metropolitan Richmond community on February 24, 2004, at St. Catherine's School during the school's observance of the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*; and

WHEREAS, Ruby Nell Bridges, while a kindergartner, epitomized "and a little child shall lead them," and it is fitting and appropriate during the Commonwealth's commemoration of *Brown v. Board of Education* that her strength, faith, sacrifice, and devotion be recognized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Ruby Nell Bridges, a leader and change agent in the history of this nation; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Ruby Nell Bridges as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration and gratitude for "leading us away from hate and nearer to each other."

INTRODUCED

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