

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 247

Commending the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 11, 2004
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 12, 2004

WHEREAS, the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin, a third generation minister of the Gospel, was born in Norfolk, Virginia, on September 15, 1917; and

WHEREAS, when he was a young child, his family moved to Farmville where he attended public schools, and after going as far as he could in the school for African-American students, he began to read on his own; and

WHEREAS, he graduated from W. S. Creedy School in Rich Square, North Carolina, and earned his undergraduate and Master of Divinity degrees from Shaw University; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Griffin, a voracious reader and avid supporter of education, both of the spirit and the mind, urged his children to become proficient in "the Word and the word," and at the time of his death on January 18, 1980, his personal library exceeded 3,000 volumes; and

WHEREAS, succeeding his father as pastor of First Baptist Church in Farmville, Reverend Griffin was active in the community, serving as president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Robert Russa Moton High School Parent Teacher Association; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Griffin believed that the church had no walls and that social justice would not be achieved unless it was wrought by the people; and

WHEREAS, as the spiritual and moral leader of African Americans in Farmville who bravely and courageously challenged practices that were unfair, unjust, and inhuman, he counseled and supported the student leaders of the strike at Robert Russa Moton High School, and provided the leadership and stamina for the Farmville fight for integration; and

WHEREAS, although his family endured many hardships in the fight for justice, they offered each other and the community unlimited love and support, and his youngest daughter was the plaintiff in *Griffin v. Prince Edward County School Board*, which reopened public schools in Prince Edward County that had been closed for five years; and

WHEREAS, *Griffin v. Prince Edward County School Board* also won for school children throughout the nation the right to an education when the right has been established in state constitutions, and the 40th anniversary of this landmark decision will be celebrated on May 25, 2004; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Griffin's tenacity and resolute stand on his beliefs earned him the title, "fighting preacher," and he once remarked that "anyone who would not back these children is not a man"; and

WHEREAS, a man of God and visionary leader, Reverend Griffin was also a spiritual, moral, and civil rights giant whose honor and integrity should have been recognized during his lifetime; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Griffin was honored posthumously by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission as the 2004 recipient of its annual Civil Rights Award, in conjunction with its four-day opening of the statewide commemoration of the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*; and

WHEREAS, because Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin refused to accept the racial inequities in public education in the Commonwealth, the long struggle for equality by African Americans in Prince Edward County saved public education in the nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin, "a giant among men and modern social prophet"; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin as an expression of the General Assembly's profound esteem, respect, and admiration of his faith, vision, leadership, and resolve to promote racial equality and ensure a quality public education for all of Virginia's students.