

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 662

Celebrating the life of William Peters Robinson, Jr., former member of the House of Delegates of Virginia.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 19, 2007

Agreed to by the Senate, January 25, 2007

WHEREAS, William Peters Robinson, Jr., was born on October 14, 1942, in Washington, D.C., and entered into eternal rest on December 18, 2006; and

WHEREAS, William Peters Robinson, Jr., earned a bachelor of arts degree from Morehouse College in 1964, and graduated from Harvard University Law School in 1967; and

WHEREAS, after graduation from Harvard University Law School, William Robinson returned to Virginia and began his legal career, quickly distinguishing himself by becoming the first African American in the Norfolk commonwealth attorney's office and the first African-American assistant attorney general in the Virginia Attorney General's office, opening doors for other African Americans; and

WHEREAS, a noted criminal defense attorney, William Robinson's reputation as a legal stalwart grew as he mentored young lawyers and diligently attended to his vast law practice and, because of his ability as a litigator, consideration mounted concerning his future as attorney general or a federal court judge; and

WHEREAS, called into service to the Commonwealth upon the death of his father, William Peters Robinson, Sr., the first African American elected to the General Assembly from Norfolk since Reconstruction, he ran for his father's seat, won it handily, and began a distinguished 20-year tenure in the House of Delegates of Virginia, from 1981 to 2001; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure, William Robinson fought valiantly for transportation, housing, and criminal justice reforms and civil rights; served as a member of the House Committees on Corporations, Insurance and Banking, Militia and Police, Appropriations, and as Chairman and Cochairman of the House Committee on Transportation; and the appointment of other African-American delegates to the powerful House Committee on Appropriations was attributed to his political acumen; and

WHEREAS, during his watch as Chairman, William Peters Robinson, Jr., built the Legislative Black Caucus into a powerful political force, and in his legislative capacity, he offered legislation to strengthen Virginia's fair housing laws, which his father had successfully initiated, led a commission that assessed and proposed a plan to fund Virginia's highway needs, led a special subcommittee that examined pretextual traffic stops and racial profiling, persuaded judges to disassociate themselves from private clubs that practice discrimination, patroned the state's legislation establishing the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday as a separate holiday, and sponsored legislation enabling Virginia to become one of the first states to establish a permanent legislative commission to honor and perpetuate the legacy of Dr. King, of which he served as chairman from 1992 to 2001; and

WHEREAS, William Peters Robinson, Jr.'s, intelligence, oratory skills, affability, and many other gifts set him apart and facilitated his easy acclimation to the political environment, and his honesty, leadership, negotiating ability, and willingness to aid young legislators earned him the respect of members of both parties; and

WHEREAS, William Peters Robinson, Jr., was compassionate and generous, giving of his time, gifts, talents, and resources to people in all stations in life, and to numerous professional, community, and civic organizations, among them The Episcopal Church; Virginia Trial Lawyers Association; Association of Trial Lawyers of America; Norfolk City Democratic Committee; Friends of the Norfolk Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court; Old Dominion University Research Foundation; Tidewater Fair Housing; Conference of Southern Legislators; Omega Psi Phi Fraternity; Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity; Crispus Attucks Cultural Center; and was a lifetime member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Virginia State Conference; and

WHEREAS, William Robinson was chairman of the Virginia Association of Black Elected Officials; general counsel for Concerned Citizens for Political Education; vice-chairman of the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Committee; board member of the Commerce Bank; Twin City, Norfolk-Portsmouth, and Old Dominion Bar Associations; past president and member of the board of directors of the Tidewater Legal Aid Society; chairman of the Southeastern Virginia Advisory Council for the Arts; and chairman of the criminal law section of the Virginia State Bar; and

WHEREAS, although William Peters Robinson, Jr., loved golf, tennis, travel, fine clothes, and expensive cars, his priority and passion were family, service to the people of Norfolk and the Commonwealth, and the law; and

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WHEREAS, an elegant and eloquent gentleman, and a gifted and imperturbable trial lawyer and legislator, William Robinson was possessed of charm and grace that buoyed him during difficult times; he was undaunted by the vicissitudes of life, and upon his retirement from the General Assembly of Virginia, he continued to practice law until physically unable, trying and winning his last case from his wheelchair; and

WHEREAS, William Peters Robinson, Jr., affectionately known as "Billy," will be remembered as a wonderful husband and father, considerate employer and successful lawyer, and his friends, colleagues and constituents will miss him and never forget his laugh, the "license plate," rock-star sunglasses, his zeal for life, and the many contributions he made to improve the quality of life for all Virginians; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of William Peters Robinson, Jr., adopted son, and former member of the House of Delegates of Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of William Peters Robinson, Jr., as an expression of the esteem in which his memory and service to the Commonwealth are held by the members of the General Assembly.