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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 728
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
(Proposed by the House Committee on Rules
on January 31, 2007)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate McEachin)

Acknowledging the contributions of varied races and cultures to the character of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and expressing profound regret for slavery and other historic wrongs rooted in racial and cultural bias and misunderstanding.

Whereas, 2007 marks the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in the Americas, at Jamestown; and

Whereas, the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity that has uniquely defined America began at Jamestown, in the Virginia colony, with the early encounters and interactions among the native peoples, Europeans, and Africans; and

Whereas, despite the acute hardship, conflict, cruelty, and oppression that characterized those first encounters and interactions, Virginians of native, European, and African descent persevered and made indispensable contributions to the survival of the colony, the founding of our good Commonwealth and nation, and the forging of our national character and culture; and

Whereas, the legacies of the Jamestown settlement and the Virginia colony include ideas, institutions, and a history that have been central to the distinctive American experiment in democracy and the global advance of democratic principles, including representative government, the rule of law, and recognition and protection of human rights, among them, religious freedom, property rights and free enterprise, freedom of expression, and the whole constellation of liberties enshrined in the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Virginia and United States Constitutions; and

Whereas, the foremost expression of these ideals that bind us as a people is found in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims as "self-evident" the truths "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; and

Whereas, despite its "self-evident" character, this fundamental principle and moral standard of liberty and equality has been transgressed during much of Virginian and American history, and our Commonwealth and nation are still working toward fulfillment of the ideals proclaimed by the founders and toward the "more perfect union" that is the aspiration of our national identity and charter; and

Whereas, these transgressions include egregious wrongs visited upon Virginia's native peoples, including dispossession of their lands, violations of solemn covenants and agreements, enforcement of "racial integrity" laws and other policies that denied their ethnic identity and undermined their cultural heritage, and other forms of discrimination; and

Whereas, these transgressions include the immoral institution of human slavery, an institution directly antithetical to and irreconcilable with the fundamental principle of human equality and freedom, and which, having been sanctioned and perpetuated through the laws of Virginia and the United States, ranks as the most horrendous of all depredations of human rights and violations of our founding ideals in our nation's history; and

Whereas, the abolition of slavery was not followed by prompt fulfillment of those founding ideals, but rather by systematic discrimination, enforced segregation, and other insidious institutions and practices toward Americans of African descent that were rooted in racism, racial bias, and racial misunderstanding; and

Whereas, despite our collective pursuit of freedom and justice for all, and our Commonwealth's and nation's remarkable progress toward that noble end, no people or group in the four centuries since Jamestown's settlement has been untouched and unaffected by racial and cultural bias, bigotry, and misunderstanding, resulting discrimination, and their sad legacies; and

Whereas, the government of this Commonwealth of Virginia, like all governments in free societies, is but a manifestation of human will, animated by high ideals but admitting of irremediable flaws, and thus susceptible to evil and error even as it aspires to goodness and truth; and

Whereas, even the most abject apology for past wrongs cannot right them, nor can it justly impute fault or responsibility to succeeding generations or justify the imposition of new benefits or burdens, yet the spirit of true repentance on behalf of a government, and, through it, a people, can serve to bring closure, to reconcile and heal, and to recall and remind so that past wrongs may never be repeated and manifest injustice may not again be overlooked; and

Whereas, in recent decades Virginians have affirmed the founding ideals of liberty and equality by, among many other acts, providing some of the nation's foremost trailblazers for civil rights, giving formal legal recognition to the state's Indian tribes, and electing a grandson of slaves to the

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60 Commonwealth's highest elective office; and

61 Whereas, such acts affirming the founding ideals of liberty and equality have provided a wholesome
62 example for the nation, a form of leadership befitting the Commonwealth's unsurpassed tradition of
63 leadership since the founding of Jamestown, and suggest that this legislative expression, the first of its
64 kind in this country, may likewise set a positive example for citizens and their governments in other
65 states; and

66 Whereas, racial and cultural diversity, and the distinctive contributions of peoples from all around the
67 world, have enriched and prospered this Commonwealth during the four centuries since the settlement of
68 Jamestown, and are cause for much thanksgiving and celebration; and

69 Whereas, the story of Virginia and its diverse peoples during these first four centuries is a story of
70 unparalleled achievement despite adversity, of great struggle and sacrifice, vision and virtue, as integral
71 to the larger American story as hope is integral to the American spirit; now, therefore, be it

72 Resolved by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly acknowledge
73 and recognize the many contributions made by people of diverse cultures and backgrounds that have
74 shaped the character and enriched the culture of our Commonwealth; and, be it

75 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the General Assembly hereby acknowledge and express its profound
76 regret for the Commonwealth's role in sanctioning the immoral institution of human slavery, in the
77 historic wrongs visited upon native peoples, and in all other forms of discrimination and injustice that
78 have been rooted in racial and cultural bias and misunderstanding; and, be it

79 RESOLVED FINALLY, That on the occasion of Virginia's 400th anniversary, the General Assembly
80 call upon the citizens of the Commonwealth to enter into a spirit of thanksgiving for the contributions
81 made by Virginians of diverse cultures and backgrounds to the advance of freedom, justice, democracy,
82 and opportunity in America and the world, of solemn remembrance of the struggles and sacrifices that
83 attended those contributions, and of celebration of the promise the future holds for fulfilling our shared
84 ideal of "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all."