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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 541

Offered February 19, 2007

Commending Oliver White Hill, Sr., venerable civil rights litigator.

Patron—Marsh

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was born in Richmond, Virginia, on May 1, 1907, and moved to Roanoke at an early age where he spent his formative years; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., graduated from Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., received his A.B. degree from Howard University, and, under the tutelage of Charles Hamilton Houston, dean of the law school and mastermind of the legal strategy that "killed Jim Crow," he graduated second in his class behind his friend, Thurgood Marshall, from the Howard University School of Law in 1933; and

WHEREAS, as a college sophomore, he was inspired to attend law school after reading the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments in an annotated Constitution of the United States given to him by his aunt, and Oliver White Hill, Sr., set upon a course to reverse Jim Crow laws by challenging the constitutionality of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896); and

WHEREAS, after graduation from law school, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was admitted to the Virginia State Bar and began his law practice in Roanoke in 1934, and later established a law firm in Richmond in 1939, practicing law "at first within the separate-but-equal framework of *Plessy* on a broad equalization campaign for better pay, transportation, and facilities for African American teachers and students"; and

WHEREAS, in 1943, Oliver White Hill, Sr., enlisted in the United States Army where he served his country valiantly and with honor and distinction from June 1943 through November 1945, and upon returning from the European Theater of World War II, he continued his struggle to dismantle Jim Crow and devoted his entire legal career to securing full constitutional rights and first-class citizenship for all Americans; and

WHEREAS, his fight for equality led to his appointment by President Truman to a committee to study racism in the United States, which recommended the establishment of the United States Civil Rights Commission, and from May 1961 to September 1966, he served as Assistant to the Federal Housing Commissioner of the Federal Housing Administration, and later as Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Mortgage Credit, and as Federal Housing Commissioner in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., is best known for his legal prowess in many of the nation's landmark civil rights cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955), and other important cases that addressed the "equalization of salaries for public school personnel; the right to serve on grand and petit juries; inclusion in the program of free bus transportation for public school children; equalization of public school facilities; protection of employment rights of firemen and other railway workers and their right to fair and impartial representation by the statutory bargaining agent; the right of participation in primary elections; the elimination of segregation on common carriers in intrastate and interstate travel; the use of public facilities in a nondiscriminatory and unsegregated fashion, including public schools and places of public assembly and recreation; the right of African Americans to secure the housing of their choice; and the right of African Americans to assert their constitutional rights and seek redress of their grievances in courts and otherwise, through an organization such as the NAACP, free from harassment by legislative investigatory committees"; and

WHEREAS, in addition to becoming a member of the Virginia State Bar, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was admitted to the federal bar for each of the federal district and appellate courts and the Bar of the United States Supreme Court; in 1971, he became a permanent member of the United States Court of Appeals Fourth Circuit Judicial Conference, and he is also a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, the Virginia Law Foundation, and the Old Dominion Law Foundation; and

WHEREAS, he has encouraged and helped to develop the use of the ballot among minorities and has worked to stimulate their participation in organized political activities, setting the benchmark in 1949, when he was elected as the first African American since Reconstruction to the Richmond City Council, and through his untiring work with the Richmond City Democratic Committee and President Truman's Committee on Government Contracts Compliance, known later as the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., continues to give liberally of his time and considerable talents to numerous legal, fraternal, community, advocacy, and civic organizations, and has served as a founder, member, officer, advisor, or mentor for such national, state, and local organizations as the National

INTRODUCED

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59 Legal Committee, NAACP; Virginia State Conference of NAACP Branches; Richmond Branch NAACP;
60 National Bar Association; Southern Conference for Human Welfare; National Association of Intergroup
61 Relations Officials; Old Dominion Bar Association; Richmond Urban League; the National Committee
62 Against Discrimination in Housing; Virginia Regional Medical Program for Heart, Cancer and Stroke;
63 the Commission on Constitutional Revision for the State of Virginia; State Bar Disciplinary Board; State
64 Bar Judiciary Committee; Board of Trustees of the George C. Marshall Foundation; and Sigma Pi Phi
65 Fraternity and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity; and

66 WHEREAS, he is a former trustee of Ebenezer Baptist Church, a lifetime member of the National
67 Bar Association and the NAACP, a former Omega Psi Phi Fraternity's National Man of the Year, and in
68 1969, Oliver White Hill, Sr., organized the 350th Commemoration of the Landing of Afro-Americans at
69 Jamestown; and

70 WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr. has received numerous accolades, honorary degrees, citations, and
71 awards in recognition of his illustrious legal career and service to the community, including most
72 notably the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1999, the highest civilian honor; the American Bar
73 Association Medal in 2000; the Springarn Medal in 2005, the NAACP's highest award to African
74 Americans for distinguished merit and achievement; the establishment of the Oliver White Hill Student
75 Pro Bono Award by the Virginia State Bar; and several pre-law and student bar associations, the Old
76 Dominion Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Richmond City Juvenile and Domestic
77 Relations District Courthouse, the street on which the Courthouse is located, and, in 2005, the Finance
78 Building in Capitol Square have been named in his honor; and

79 WHEREAS, as senior partner in the law firm of Hill, Tucker and Marsh, Oliver White Hill, Sr.,
80 practiced law until his retirement at age 91, in July 1998; and

81 WHEREAS, a courageous civil rights leader, confronted with threats against his life and the lives of
82 his family, Oliver White Hill, Sr., has devoted his life to building a more just and inclusive America,
83 has successfully litigated landmark cases that secured equal rights for African Americans in education,
84 employment, housing, voting, and jury selection, and has fought to improve the lives of the citizens of
85 the Commonwealth and the nation with his unwavering dedication to justice and freedom for all; and

86 WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr. "has toiled for more than two generations to make equality and
87 justice living realities for all the people of the United States," and it is fitting and proper, on the
88 occasion of his 100th birthday, that the Commonwealth salute her native son for his tremendous
89 sacrifices and contributions to the legal profession, his community, and the protection of the "rights to
90 life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; now, therefore, be it

91 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
92 commend Oliver White Hill, Sr., venerable civil rights litigator, "who challenged the laws of our land
93 and the conscience of our country"; and, be it

94 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for
95 presentation to Oliver White Hill, Sr., as an expression of the respect, admiration, and esteem of the
96 General Assembly for his noble and dedicated service to the Commonwealth and for advancing the
97 ideals of this nation.