

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 541

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

Agreed to by the Senate, February 22, 2007
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 23, 2007

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 (FHA), and later as assistant to the assistant secretary for mortgage and credit and commissioner of FHA 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

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

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

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., has received numerous accolades, honorary degrees, citations, and awards in recognition of his illustrious legal career and service to the community, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1999, the highest civilian honor; the American Bar Association (ABA) Medal in 2000; the Springarn Medal in 2005, the NAACP's highest award to African Americans for distinguished merit and achievement; the establishment of the Oliver White Hill Student Pro Bono Award by the Virginia State Bar; and several pre-law and student bar associations, the Old Dominion Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, and the naming in his honor of the Richmond City Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Courthouse and the street adjacent to the courthouse and, in 2005, the Finance Building in Capitol Square; and

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

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

WHEREAS, ABA President William G. Paul noted that "Oliver Hill has toiled for more than two generations to make equality and justice living realities for all the people of the United States," and it is appropriate, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, that the Commonwealth salute her native son for his tremendous sacrifices and contributions to the legal profession, his community, and the protection of the "rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Oliver White Hill, Sr., venerable civil rights litigator, who, in the words of President William J. Clinton, "challenged the laws of our land and the conscience of our country"; and, be it

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