

2008 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 189

Celebrating the life of Herman T. Benn.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 11, 2008
Agreed to by the Senate, January 17, 2008

WHEREAS, Herman T. Benn of Suffolk, a respected citizen, pioneering attorney, and community benefactor, died on June 29, 2007; and

WHEREAS, Herman Benn earned a bachelor of arts degree in education and philosophy from Virginia Union University, received a law degree from Robert H. Terrell Law School in Washington, D.C., and served his country as a noncommissioned officer in the United States Army Reserves during World War II; and

WHEREAS, throughout his life and career, Herman Benn fought for civil rights and fairness for all of his fellow citizens in Virginia and the nation; and

WHEREAS, in 1962 in a landmark decision that would affect people across the United States, Herman Benn represented a college student, Ford T. Johnson, who was charged with contempt of court during a traffic violation hearing for sitting in a section reserved for whites in a Virginia courtroom; and

WHEREAS, when appealed to the United States Supreme Court, Herman Benn won the precedent setting case, Johnson v. Commonwealth of Virginia, which determined that segregating people in courtrooms based on race was unconstitutional; the high court reversed the young man's conviction, stating "state-compelled segregation in a court of justice is a manifest violation of the State's duty to deny no one the equal protection of its laws"; and

WHEREAS, always concerned with improving the quality of life and protecting the civil rights of his fellow citizens, Herman Benn touched the lives of countless people throughout his career as chair of the Legal Redress Committee of the NAACP and in his many years of outstanding public service; and

WHEREAS, Herman Benn was tenacious in gathering information on his cases, and he worked tirelessly to help citizens in need resolve their legal difficulties; and

WHEREAS, a dedicated and exceptional lawyer, Herman Benn was the first African American to serve as assistant city attorney in Richmond, and he later worked as assistant attorney for the Commonwealth for Suffolk; and

WHEREAS, in 1968 Herman Benn was appointed a federal administrative law judge and served in that position in both the United States Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Labor; and

WHEREAS, Herman Benn gave his time and immense talent to numerous civic and professional organizations over the years, including as a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the Suffolk Bar Association, and he was the first African-American member of the Virginia Bar Association; and

WHEREAS, always eager to lend a helping hand to his neighbors, Herman Benn was a faithful member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church and was active in the church's many missions in the community; and

WHEREAS, Herman Benn will be fondly remembered for his kind and generous nature and will be greatly missed by his wife Marian Waller Benn; his numerous loving family members and friends; and the citizens of Suffolk and the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly mourn the passing of a fine attorney and outstanding Virginian, Herman T. Benn; 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 Herman T. Benn as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

ENROLLED

HJ189ER