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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 251

Offered January 18, 2008

Celebrating the life of Oliver White Hill, Sr., civil rights icon and centenarian.

Patrons—Hall, Abbitt, Alexander, Armstrong, BaCote, Bulova, Dance, Ebbin, Eisenberg, Hamilton, Hull, Ingram, Joannou, Johnson, Jones, D.C., Jones, S.C., Lewis, Loupassi, Marsden, Mathieson, McClellan, Moran, Morgan, Morrissey, O'Bannon, Oder, Phillips, Pogge, Scott, J.M., Shannon, Shuler, Sickles, Spruill, Toscano, Tyler, Valentine, Ward, Ware, O., Ware, R.L. and Watts; Senators: Deeds and McEachin

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was born in Richmond, Virginia, on May 1, 1907, and passed into eternal life on August 5, 2007, full of years, at age 100; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., legendary civil rights litigator, graduated from Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., and received his baccalaureate from Howard University; and

WHEREAS, 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, 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, while a student at the Howard University Law School, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was tutored by Charles Hamilton Houston, dean of the law school and mastermind of the legal strategy that "killed Jim Crow," and graduated in 1933 second in his class behind his friend, Thurgood Marshall; 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, Oliver White Hill, Sr., served his country valiantly and with honor and distinction in the United States Army from June 1943 through November 1945, and resumed his legal career and struggle to dismantle Jim Crow upon returning from the European Theatre of World War II; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., prepared himself for the long struggle by becoming a member of 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 was also a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, the Virginia Law Foundation, and the Old Dominion Law Foundation; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was an exceptional legal scholar, strategist, and litigator, having participated in several landmark civil rights cases, among them Brown v. Board of Education, 349 U.S. 294 (1955), and other important cases that secured constitutional rights for African Americans and other minorities in housing, education, employment, voting rights, transportation, places of public assembly and recreation, and the redress of grievances through the courts; and

WHEREAS, a pioneer in the fight for civil rights, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was the first African American since Reconstruction elected to the Richmond City Council, and he encouraged and helped to develop the use of the ballot among minorities, and worked to stimulate their participation in organized political activities; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr., gave unselfishly of his time and considerable talents to legal, fraternal, community, advocacy, and civic organizations, and received numerous accolades, honorary degrees, citations, and awards during his lifetime in recognition of his illustrious legal career and service to the community, including most notably the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1999, the American Bar Association Medal in 2000, the Springarn Medal in 2005, and the Old Dominion Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award; also, named in his honor are the Richmond City Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Courthouse, the street on which the Courthouse is located, and 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 was actively engaged in the work of the firm through regular communications with and mentoring of the attorneys and employees of his firm until his death; and

WHEREAS, few individuals have worked as tirelessly as Oliver White Hill, Sr., to advance and secure the blessings of liberty for all people, and few have persevered and braved threats to personal and family safety to devote their lives to the noble cause of freedom, justice, equality, and human dignity for the people of the Commonwealth and this nation; and

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WHEREAS, blessed with 100 years of life, Oliver White Hill, Sr., was born when the life expectancy in America was 47, the cost of a stamp was $0.02, and the average wage was $0.22 per hour; the American flag had 45 stars; there was no Mother's Day or Father's Day; and iced tea had not yet been invented; and he witnessed many unforgettable and historic events, among them, the administrations of 19 United States Presidents, from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush; the horrors of World War II and the emergence of the United States as a world power; the discovery of the planet Pluto; the end of the Cold War; the first man on the moon; the end of Jim Crow and Apartheid; the advent of the "Beloved Community"; and the election of the nation's first African-American governor; and

WHEREAS, Oliver White Hill, Sr.'s, "works speak for him," and memories of him will be cherished by his family and many friends, and his legacy of a life of sacrifice and devotion to the betterment of mankind is a challenge for all; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby mourn the loss of Oliver White Hill, Sr., native son, centenarian, and venerable civil rights icon, litigator, and pioneer, "who challenged the laws of our land and the conscience of our country"; 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 Oliver White Hill, Sr., as an expression of the veneration and respect in which his life, contributions, and memory are held by the members of the General Assembly.