

2008 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 552

Commending the Norfolk 17 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of their struggle to integrate the public schools of Norfolk.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 5, 2008

Agreed to by the Senate, March 6, 2008

WHEREAS, the members of the Norfolk 17 were the true heroes of the school integration struggle in Norfolk; and

WHEREAS, as young men and women, Geraldine Talley Hobby, Louis Cousins, Betty Jean Reed, Lolita Portis, Reginald Young, LaVera Forbes, James Turner, Jr., Patricia Turner, Edward Jordan, Claudia Wellington, Andrew Heidelberg, Alvarez Frederick Gonsouland, Delores Johnson Brown, Johnnie Rouse, Olivia Driver Lindsay, Carol Wellington, and Patricia Godbolt entered six of the previously all-white public schools in the city, persevering in the face of intense racial animosity; and

WHEREAS, during the spring and summer of 1958, the members of the Norfolk 17 were encouraged by their parents, church members, and local civil rights leaders to join with the NAACP in its attempt to enforce the Brown decision in Norfolk; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Norfolk 17 attended segregated black schools in Norfolk and were well aware of the inequities within Norfolk's public school system; and

WHEREAS, at the time, not one public school in the city or state had been integrated, and the members of the Norfolk 17 took a great risk when they agreed to participate; and

WHEREAS, after they were to take a battery of academic and psychological tests overseen by members of the school board, the Norfolk 17 were selected out of 151 applicants to be grudgingly admitted to six of the city's all-white secondary schools; and

WHEREAS, to avoid integration by the Norfolk 17, on September 29, 1958, six of Norfolk's formerly all-white schools were closed and more than 9,000 white students, along with the Norfolk 17, were kept from school; and

WHEREAS, targets of intense criticism, public scrutiny, and locked out of public school, the members of the Norfolk 17 attended school at Bute Street Baptist Church during the winter of 1958; and

WHEREAS, in January of 1959, the Virginia Supreme Court declared that the school closings in Norfolk were unconstitutional, and on February 2, 1959, the Norfolk 17 became the first African-American students to attend the previously all-white schools in the largest school district in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Norfolk 17 faced many difficulties as they entered their new schools, but met the challenges and persevered through the hardships, graduated, and went on to achieve great things as members of the larger American community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Geraldine Talley Hobby, Louis Cousins, Betty Jean Reed, Lolita Portis, Reginald Young, LaVera Forbes, James Turner, Jr., Patricia Turner, Edward Jordan, Claudia Wellington, Andrew Heidelberg, Alvarez Frederick Gonsouland, Delores Johnson Brown, Johnnie Rouse, Olivia Driver Lindsay, Carol Wellington, and Patricia Godbolt on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of their brave and heroic actions to demand equal opportunities in education for all Virginians, regardless of race; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare copies of this resolution for presentation to the members of the Norfolk 17 and their families as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude for their courage, perseverance, and dedication to equality for all Virginians.

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