

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 44

Celebrating the life of Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy, courageous civil rights pioneer.

Agreed to by the Senate, January 17, 2008
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 25, 2008

WHEREAS, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy, born the sixth of nine children into a Seventh-day Adventist family on April 9, 1917, in Baltimore, entered into eternal rest on August 10, 2007, at her family's homestead in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, reared in Baltimore during the Depression in a family that "eschewed all signs of aggrandizement and stressed the need to act righteously and trust in God," Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy was nurtured to shun confrontation and to strive for excellence in all her endeavors; and

WHEREAS, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy was humble, reserved, and generous, and believed it was both moral and important to stand against injustice and wrongdoing regardless of prevailing opinions; and

WHEREAS, in July 1944, eleven years before Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus, galvanizing the Civil Rights Movement, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy, recuperating from a miscarriage, boarded a Greyhound bus in Gloucester for a doctor's appointment in Baltimore, and took a seat next to a young mother with an infant about midway in the "Colored" section, where she was forced to sit by law; and

WHEREAS, when the bus became overcrowded, the bus driver ordered Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy and her seatmate to give up their seats to make room for a white couple boarding the bus; however, she refused to relinquish her seat, was dragged off the bus, arrested, convicted, and fined for resisting arrest and violating Virginia's segregation laws; and

WHEREAS, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy was represented by Spottswood W. Robinson, III, a renowned Richmond civil rights attorney, who later became one of the core attorneys of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund that argued *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the first African American to be appointed to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia and the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and its Chief Judge, who mounted a defense that segregation laws were impractical because they impeded interstate commerce but the Middlesex Circuit Court ruled against him; and

WHEREAS, in 1946, William Henry Hastie, Dean of the Howard University Law School, and Thurgood Marshall, who would become the first African-American Supreme Court justice, appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court, arguing not on moral grounds that segregation was morally repugnant, but that "The national business of interstate commerce is not to be disfigured by the disruptive local practices bred of racial notions alien to our national ideal"; and

WHEREAS, on June 3, 1946, the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, 328 U.S. 373 (1946), struck down Virginia's law requiring segregated seating in public transportation as unconstitutional and banned segregated seating in interstate travel, and because many Southern states ignored and did not enforce the decision, the victory did not become a reality in practice until the Freedom Rides during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, although Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy took a courageous stand during perilous times and changed the course of history in America, she was an "extremely humble" individual who lived her life doing extraordinary things without fanfare, "doing what was right," and inspiring her family by her example of acts grand and neighborly, including sharing Thanksgiving dinner with countless uncles and homeless men, offering them facilities to bathe, doing their laundry, and furnishing them new clothes every year; caring for numerous African students attending college in Baltimore; rescuing a boy from a burning building; circulating petitions against school segregation in Baltimore without telling people who she was; and writing to the Pope to intervene on behalf of a Haitian whose children had been barred from parochial school; and

WHEREAS, forced to leave school at age 15 to help support her family, she worked in a plant that made World War II bombers; nevertheless, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy dreamed of continuing her education, and later in life at age 68, she earned a baccalaureate degree in communications from St. John's University in 1985, and at age 73, a master's degree in Urban Studies from Queen's College in 1990; and

WHEREAS, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy was a woman of integrity who, over the years, refused to accept honorary doctorates because she had not earned them, and she was an astute businesswoman who, together with her husband, owned and operated a maid service and a child care center in Queens; and

WHEREAS, for too long, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy's stand against injustice was a footnote of history, and she never received the recognition and place of honor in history that she deserved for awakening the national conscience to the indignities of segregation; however, in recent years her contribution has been acknowledged, including by Gloucester County in 2000 during the celebration of its 350th anniversary with the creation of four scholarships in her honor; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, upon awarding the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest honor for United States civilians, President Clinton noted that "she took the first step on a journey that would change America forever"; and

WHEREAS, Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy will be mourned by family, friends, and many others whose lives she personally touched, but moreover she will be remembered for her courage, tenacity, and remarkable strength in those defining moments in the history of the United States, for her mantra, "When something's wrong, it's wrong. It needs to be corrected," and for her unwavering moral conviction that opened the doors of opportunity for all people and helped make Virginia and the nation a more just society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy, humble, generous, and courageous civil rights pioneer; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Irene Amos Morgan Kirkaldy as an expression of the General Assembly's deep and abiding respect for her life of unparalleled service to her community, the Commonwealth, and the nation.