

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 283

Celebrating the life of Dr. Dorothy Irene Height, legendary civil rights leader.

Agreed to by the Senate, January 13, 2011

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 21, 2011

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height was born in Richmond on March 24, 1912, and entered into eternal life on April 20, 2010, two years shy of her centennial birthday; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height, the daughter of Fannie Burroughs Height and James Height, devout Christians who were born shortly after the Civil War, was reared in the South during the era of Jim Crow; yet, her parents, both educated and ambitious, encouraged her to excel academically and to be actively engaged in community service; and

WHEREAS, due to the limitations imposed by a segregated South and the promise of opportunities in the North, at the age of four, Dorothy Irene Height's family moved to Rankin, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, where she attended integrated public schools and established herself as an outstanding and gifted student with exceptional oratorical skills; and

WHEREAS, in spite of her family's relocation to the North, she did not escape the sting and rebuke of racism; when Dorothy Irene Height was appointed as the student director of her mostly white elementary school chorus, her school's principal forbade her to assume the position, resulting in the school chorus' refusal to sing in a school assembly until her reinstatement as student director; and

WHEREAS, to earn money for college during the economic depression of the 1930s, Dorothy Irene Height competed in a national oratorical contest in which she delivered a speech on the Reconstruction Amendments, won a scholarship, and was admitted to Barnard College; however, upon her arrival at Barnard College, she was turned away because the College's policies permitted the enrollment of only two African American students each academic year; and

WHEREAS, undaunted by Barnard College's rejection, Dorothy Irene Height entered New York University, where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in just four years, and pursued post-graduate work at the New York University School of Social Work and Columbia University; and

WHEREAS, after graduation from college she worked as a teacher in Brooklyn, and from 1934 to 1937 she worked as a social worker for the New York City Department of Welfare before leaving to accept a position as counselor with the Young Women's Christian Association of New York City; and

WHEREAS, witnessing the effects of poverty, the subjugation of African American women, and the human degradation resulting from racial animus, Dorothy Irene Height, while serving as assistant director of the YWCA's Emma Ransom House in Harlem, met First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), who invited her to join the NCNW in the fight for women's rights, equal employment, and education; and

WHEREAS, as a civil rights advocate whose work spanned more than six decades, Dorothy Irene Height worked to desegregate public schools and the armed forces, prevent lynching, provide for free access to public accommodations, and reform the criminal justice system, and was often described as the "glue that held the family of African American civil rights leaders together"; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height emerged as one of the foremost leaders of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, serving alongside Roy Wilkins, Whitney H. Young, A. Phillip Randolph, John Lewis, James Farmer, Judge Constance Baker Motley, Fannie Lou Hamer, Benjamin Hooks, Rosa Parks, Justice Thurgood Marshall, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; she was the only woman on the dais at the historic March on Washington on August 28, 1963; and she worked diligently and quietly behind the scenes with political and business leaders at the pinnacles of government and corporate power to achieve her goals, even advising the nation's presidents from President Dwight Eisenhower through President Barack Obama; and

WHEREAS, she is without peer for her numerous contributions to civic life and community service, the cause of education, racial equality, civil liberties, women's rights, and the development of international volunteer programs throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height was generous with her time, resources, and talents, and helped to organize and lead the United Christian Youth Movement of North America, founded the annual Black Family Reunion to counter the negative images of African American family life, and was affiliated with many national and international organizations, including serving as president of the National Council of Negro Women for more than 40 years and as chair and president emerita until her death; president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority from 1946 until 1977; visiting professor at the University of Delhi School of Social Work in India; and sole female member of the National Council for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height received many national awards and accolades during her lifetime, most notably the Presidential Medal of Freedom on March 24, 2004, her 92nd birthday; the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian and most distinguished award presented by the United States Congress; the NAACP Spingarn Medal; induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame; and she also received 36 honorary doctorate degrees from universities and colleges such as Tuskegee University, Spelman College, Pace University, Bennett College, Lincoln University, Harvard University, Howard University, Princeton University, New York University, Morehouse College, Meharry Medical College, and Columbia University; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy Irene Height, regal and resplendent in the unique hats that she wore as crowns, exuded confidence, strength, resoluteness, and a brilliant acumen for every endeavor on which she embarked, exemplifying African American womanhood; and

WHEREAS, President Obama respectfully and affectionately referred to her as the "Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement," and she devoted her life to the struggle for racial equality and social justice; and

WHEREAS, the nation and the people of the Commonwealth are indebted to the enormous contributions and sacrifices of Dorothy Irene Height, deeply mourn her death, and will preserve her legacy; 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 Dorothy Irene Height, native daughter and legendary civil rights leader; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Dorothy Irene Height as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation of her outstanding contributions to mankind and its profound respect for her memory.