13104918D

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 309

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Rules
on February 4, 2013)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Marsh)

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

WHEREAS, fifty years ago on Wednesday, August 28, 1963, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., over 300,000 people, composed of minorities and non-minorities in one of the largest political rallies for human rights in United States history, called for human, civil, and economic rights for African Americans in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; and

WHEREAS, the march was organized by a coalition of civil rights, labor, and religious groups whose clarion call echoed "jobs and freedom" and demanded the end of racial discrimination in all segments of society, a stop to police brutality, a minimum wage of $2.00 an hour, and self-government for Washington, D.C.; the march was one of the first demonstrations to have extensive television coverage; and

WHEREAS, freedom came legislatively to African Americans through the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution after the end of the American Civil War in 1865; however, freedom was deliberately and systematically denied through the use of Black Codes during slavery and later with the implementation of Jim Crow Laws, which were in effect until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, African Americans continued to suffer indignities and injustices because of the color of their skin and were discriminated against in housing, employment, public transportation, and the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, civil rights protests kindled racial unrest as African Americans grew increasingly tired of and dismayed by waiting for the promises of democracy, freedom, and justice to be fulfilled, and dozens of peaceful civil rights demonstrations occurred throughout the nation, culminating in the sweltering summer with the March on Washington; and

WHEREAS, on August 28, 2013, the nation will once again remember and commemorate the soaring, inspirational, and electrifying oratory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial to deliver his historic "I Have a Dream" speech in which he advocated equality, justice, and racial harmony—the "Beloved Community"; and

WHEREAS, alluding to the Gettysburg Address and openly quoting scripture in his passionate and powerful speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., illustrated the fact that for African Americans the promises of the Declaration of Independence held little meaning and had never been fulfilled; and

WHEREAS, eloquent and masterfully delivered, Dr. King's speech reminded Americans of the promises of democracy, the equality of all men, the quicksand of racial injustice, the bedrock of brotherhood, the hallowed ground upon which the marchers stood, and the fierce urgency for the nation's leaders and its people to act with dispatch to make African Americans full citizens; and

WHEREAS, although many high-ranking elected officials reacted to the demand for civil rights laws as a perceived threat to the status quo and gaining civil rights was not easily won, the nation was outraged by the arrests of Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was enraged by the images of "Bloody Sunday," on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama, when peaceful marchers protesting the disenfranchisement of African Americans were brutally attacked, beaten, and tear-gassed; the violence against civil rights protesters and African Americans sent shock waves through the nation; and

WHEREAS, although some in the African American community doubted the potential of the March on Washington to be successful, others provided noteworthy speeches calling for a nonviolent revolution to the end of Jim Crow and immediate freedom from the chains of political and economic slavery without waiting on any agency of government or leaning upon any political party because they had betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence, and the march is widely credited with helping to enact the hard-fought Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, drawing on a familiar didactic and metaphorical cadence commonly used in the African American Baptist church, Dr. King described the "Beloved Community" as "I have a dream," vividly painting the picture of civil rights on a moral and divine canvas in which all persons are "judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King's searing "I Have a Dream" speech was more than "a legal brief on the intricacies of the civil rights movement in America or an intellectual treatise on the plight of African Americans"; it has been described as a fervently emotional sermon imbued with the language and spirit of democracy, driven by his intellect, exegesis of scripture, unparalleled understanding of history, masterful oratorical skills, magnetism, and sincerity that elevated familiar platitudes from cliche to

9/11/22 12:13

SENATE SUBSTITUTE

SJ309S1

commandment; and

WHEREAS, fifty years have passed since Dr. King seared the nation's conscience and challenged it to live up to its creed, and although considerable progress has been made since that momentous day on the National Mall, so much more remains to be accomplished; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech be commemorated; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Executive Director of the State Council of Higher Education, the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, and the Executive Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents, and to the members of the Virginia Congressional delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.