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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 144

Offered January 14, 2014

*Commending First Baptist Church of Hampton on its sesquicentennial anniversary.*Patron—Ward

WHEREAS, birthed in the cradle of American civilization, the home of Native Americans, and the place of the arrival of the first Europeans and Africans, First Baptist Church of Hampton arose in 1863, from the white-controlled Hampton Baptist Church established in 1791; and

WHEREAS, congregants in the Hampton Baptist Church in March 1861, on the eve of the American Civil War, numbered 949 African American and 187 white members; and

WHEREAS, according to First Baptist Church of Hampton's church history, on May 23, 1861, Shepard Mallory, Frank Baker, and James Townsend escaped from slavery to Fort Monroe, where they were declared Contraband of War and were not returned to their former slave holders; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding the weight of slavery and racial animus, the ancestors of First Baptist Church of Hampton members included regular field hands, craftsmen, property owners, literate persons, and the enslaved, who were closely aligned with free Blacks who resourcefully acquired real and personal property; and

WHEREAS, after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Reverend William B. Taylor, the church's first pastor, guided the creation of First Baptist Church of Hampton, the first independent African American church in Hampton; and

WHEREAS, Reverend William B. Taylor used the carpentry skills learned in his youth to help erect a frame house of worship on 55 acres of land owned by James Bailey, a freedman and African American veteran of the Revolutionary War, who received his freedom and a land grant from the Commonwealth in gratitude for his services during the Revolutionary War; and

WHEREAS, in 1866, the Committee on the Inquiry of Hampton Baptist Church recommended, "inasmuch as colored members have organized themselves into a distinct body, they be dismissed from said church, excepting such as may voluntarily declare preference for their former connection," severing the ties between Hampton Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Hampton; and

WHEREAS, throughout its 150-year history, First Baptist Church of Hampton, led by God through able ministers of the Gospel and dedicated leadership, has persevered through triumphs and trials, held fervent worship services, inspired members with the teaching and study of the word of God, exhilarated worshippers with celestial music, baptized thousands of souls, added hundreds to the church rolls, established numerous intergenerational ministries to spiritually feed its members from the youngest to the oldest, served as a beacon light in and faithfully fulfilled its calling to serve the Hampton Roads community, and provided a refuge for the lost; and

WHEREAS, with God's grace and mercy and with the church's capable and visionary pastor, Reverend Dr. Richard W. Wills, Sr., said "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend First Baptist Church of Hampton on the occasion of its sesquicentennial anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Reverend Dr. Richard W. Wills, Sr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Hampton, as an expression of the General Assembly's congratulations on the church's sesquicentennial anniversary, appreciation of its service to the Hampton Roads community, and best wishes for many years of future success.

INTRODUCED

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