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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 57

Offered January 8, 2014

Prefiled January 7, 2014

Celebrating the life of the Honorable James Edward Sheffield.

Patron—Marsh

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield, one of nine children of a railroad Pullman porter's family, was born during the Great Depression in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on October 25, 1932, and died in Richmond on March 28, 2013; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield attended Wilson Junior College and Roosevelt College in Chicago, Illinois, and studied at Texas College, in Tyler, Texas, before attending the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1955; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield served his country honorably and with valor in the United States Air Force at Byrd Field from 1955 to 1959 as a personnel specialist for Air Force Reserve training and was promoted to the rank of staff sergeant; and

WHEREAS, after his military service, he was employed as District Scout Executive for the Frederick Douglass District of the Boy Scouts of America in Richmond from January 1959 to September 1960, before departing to study law at Howard University, and while a law student at Howard University, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield served as a law clerk for the Legal Counsel for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and for the Honorable Spottswood Robinson, then dean of the Howard University Law School; he graduated cum laude from the Howard University School of Law in June 1963; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield began his distinguished legal career as a trial attorney in the Civil Division of the United States Department of Justice under the Attorney General's Honor Program in the Civil Division, Court of Claims Section, in Washington, D.C., as a litigator for the federal government from September 1963 to September 1964; in March 1964, he returned to Richmond and became engaged in the general practice of law as a sole practitioner; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield also served as a full-time assistant professor of law at the Howard University School of Law from September 1964 to September 1966, and thereafter worked as assistant professor of law at Howard University on a part-time basis until February 1968; he faithfully supported his alma mater throughout his professional career, commuting daily to teach law classes at Howard University; and

WHEREAS, on November 1, 1974, Governor Mills E. Godwin appointed the Honorable James Edward Sheffield as the first African American to the Circuit Court of the City of Richmond, where he also served as Chief Judge of the Circuit Court from November 1, 1982 to August 1, 1984, until his retirement from the bench; and

WHEREAS, in 1980, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield was nominated for a federal judgeship for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia by President James Earl Carter; and

WHEREAS, after his retirement from the judiciary, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield returned to the practice of general law, becoming a partner in the law firm of Little, Parsley & Cluverius, P.C. in the historic Jackson Ward area of the city, and in March 1986, he became the managing partner of the law firm of James Edward Sheffield, P.C.; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield was also a lecturer of law at the University of Virginia from 1975 and an adjunct professor of law at the University of Richmond School of Law from 1976 until his death; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield was active in various professional legal organizations and was involved in leadership positions in community endeavors; he was instrumental in the formation of the Old Dominion Bar Association; he was the recipient of numerous honors and awards, which included the Astoria Beneficial Club's Citizenship Award in 1974; the King Solomon Lodge No. 27, Free and Accepted Masons Citizenship and Service Award in 1974; Phi Phi Chapter, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Citizen of the Year Award in 1975; the YMCA's Model Judiciary Program Participation Award in 1977; the NAACP's Lynchburg Chapter Citizenship Award in 1979; Howard University School of Law Student Bar Association's John Mercer Langston Outstanding Alumnus Award for 1980; the United Nations' Kenneth David Kaunda Award for Humanism in 1981; and the 1982-1983 Regional Sire Archon of the Southeast Region of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity; he was also honored by the Nigerian government with an invitation to address Nigerian judges to compare the constitutions of Nigeria and the United States; and

59 WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield was a former member of the Virginia
60 Commonwealth University and St. Paul's College boards of trustees; a member of the board of directors
61 of Chippenham Hospital, Children's Hospital, and Richmond Community Hospital; a member of the
62 Downtown Club of Richmond, Focus Club, Guardsmen, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, National
63 Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Richmond First Club, Richmond Urban League,
64 Richmond Forum, the National Bar Association, American Bar Association, and Old Dominion Bar
65 Association; and a 32nd degree Mason; and

66 WHEREAS, a longtime and devoted member of Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Honorable James
67 Edward Sheffield chaired the church's board of trustees and building council; and

68 WHEREAS, the Honorable James Edward Sheffield's legacy as an eminent legal scholar and his
69 groundbreaking and distinguished judicial career is worthy of emulation, and his presence in the
70 community, as a faithful churchman, and dedicated husband and father will be sorely missed by all who
71 loved and knew him; now, therefore, be it

72 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
73 note with great sadness the loss of the Honorable James Edward Sheffield; and, be it

74 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for
75 presentation to the family of the Honorable James Edward Sheffield, the first African American
76 appointed to the Circuit Court of the City of Richmond, as an expression of the General Assembly's
77 respect for his memory and dedicated service to the Commonwealth.