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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 743

Offered February 4, 2015

Commending Eugene Williams.

Patrons—Toscano and McClellan; Senator: Deeds

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams of Charlottesville, a longtime community leader and advocate for civil rights, was honored on November 5, 2014, as a Paul Harris Fellow by the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club for his leadership and vision and especially for his work to remove racial barriers and provide affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams is a native of Charlottesville, which was markedly segregated when he was a young boy; he attended blacks-only public schools, and his home, which fronted a dirt road, had no indoor plumbing; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from the Jefferson High School in Charlottesville, Eugene Williams attended Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; he then served a tour of duty in the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, in 1953, Eugene Williams returned home and began working in the insurance business, becoming Regional Vice President of Universal Life Insurance Company; the following year he was named president of the Charlottesville Branch of the NAACP and was in the forefront of the civil rights movement in Charlottesville for many years; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams and his wife, Lorraine Payne Williams, formed a committee of parents to integrate the Charlottesville Public Schools; the group won a lawsuit that ordered two public schools to desegregate, but the school system closed the two schools rather than comply with the court order; and

WHEREAS, when the Charlottesville Public Schools reopened in 1962, the Williams' two daughters, Karol and Scheryl, ages 10 and 8 respectively, were enrolled at and escorted by police to formerly all-white schools; years later their daughter Scheryl was named Homecoming Queen at Lane High School, which was less than 10 percent African American; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams also was concerned about the loss of the working-class neighborhood of Vinegar Hill; during Charlottesville's urban renewal efforts, many African American homes and businesses were demolished, creating a demand for affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams, together with his wife, Lorraine, brother, Albert, and sister-in-law, Emma, bought and rehabilitated 62 housing units in Charlottesville; they formed Dogwood Housing to rehabilitate and rent the apartments to low-income and underserved families, and they owned the successful property management company until they sold it in 2007; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams was nominated in 1986 to join the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club; his life's mission—to erase segregation and help the less fortunate in Charlottesville—epitomizes Rotary's motto of "Service Above Self"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Eugene Williams of Charlottesville, a community leader and civil rights advocate, who was named a Paul Harris Fellow by the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club for his leadership and vision in removing racial barriers and providing affordable housing; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Eugene Williams as an expression of the General Assembly's great respect and admiration for his unwavering determination to right a wrong and provide equal opportunity for all people.

INTRODUCED

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