

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 226

*Commemorating the 240th anniversary of George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights in 2016.*

Agreed to by the Senate, February 2, 2015

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 24, 2015

WHEREAS, on May 6, 1776, in response to a recommendation of the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia that the colonies draft documents necessary for the creation of new governments, the fifth Virginia Convention was convened in Williamsburg; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Convention established a committee to draft a constitution and bill of rights; according to historical accounts, Delegate George Mason arrived in Williamsburg on May 17, 1776, and was appointed to the prestigious committee; and

WHEREAS, as primary author, George Mason undertook the monumental task of writing the requested constitution and bill of rights, which was reviewed by the committee, presented to the full Convention, and ratified as the Virginia Declaration of Rights on June 12, 1776; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Declaration of Rights expressed ideas of seminal importance that proved influential during the transformative period in American history and that are still relevant today; and

WHEREAS, in Article 1 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, George Mason penned, "That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety"; and

WHEREAS, in subsequent articles, George Mason expressed, articulated, and called for fundamental liberties and freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and the right to a uniform government; he further defined the rights of persons accused of a crime, including the right to a speedy trial by a jury of one's peers and without excessive bail, the right to confront one's accuser, and rights to protect the accused from self-incrimination; and

WHEREAS, George Mason provided a framework of government in the Virginia Declaration of Rights based on the belief that all power is vested in and derived from the people and that government exists for the benefit, protection, and security of the people; he emphasized the separation of powers and the basic necessity of representation for the people whom government serves; and

WHEREAS, in subsequent decades following the ratification of the Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776, George Mason's timeless expressions of rights, liberties, and the purpose and necessary structure of a unified government has served as the primary influence for multiple state constitutions, the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and

WHEREAS, George Mason expressed the importance of the pursuit of happiness as an inherent right of the individual; his words significantly inspired and informed the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, which was ratified less than one month after the ratification of the Virginia Declaration of Rights; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of the significant universal impact of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and of George Mason as its principal author, it is fitting and proper that appropriate events recognize and signal the 240th anniversary of the ratification of the Virginia Declaration of Rights throughout the year of 2016; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the 240th anniversary of George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights be commemorated in 2016; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to Scott M. Stroh, III, Executive Director of Gunston Hall, requesting that he further disseminate copies of this resolution to his respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.