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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 156

Offered February 19, 2018

Celebrating the life of Ruth Ann Rogers Wise Kellam.

Patron—Lewis

WHEREAS, Ruth Ann Rogers Wise Kellam, a beloved wife and mother, dedicated educator, and influential community leader who helped bring economic development and home ownership to numerous residents of the Eastern Shore, died on July 20, 2017; and

WHEREAS, Ruth Wise Kellam, known to most people as Ruth Wise, was born in the Eastern Shore community of Willis Wharf and graduated as valedictorian of the Northampton County High School class of 1960; and

WHEREAS, Ruth Wise earned a bachelor's degree from Virginia State University in 1964 and then taught French at Peabody High School in Petersburg; she later received a master's degree from Old Dominion University; and

WHEREAS, in 1980, Ruth Wise joined the faculty at Eastern Shore Community College in Melfa; as part of her teaching duties, she regularly traveled the Eastern Shore in a motorhome to teach literacy skills to low-income residents and prepare students for their GED tests; and

WHEREAS, after teaching for nearly two decades, Ruth Wise left Eastern Shore Community College to become executive director at New Road Community Development Group of Exmore, an organization originally founded to secure indoor plumbing and sewer services for homes in the low-income African American enclave of New Road; and

WHEREAS, under Ruth Wise's able leadership, the New Road Community Development Group set its sights on increasing opportunities for home ownership in New Road; after forming strategic partnerships and securing millions of dollars in grants, the group bought land and houses from absentee landlords, upgraded dozens of substandard houses, and made it possible for 60 people to become homeowners for the first time; and

WHEREAS, known throughout her community for her colorful African clothing and booming voice, Ruth Wise also served on the Northampton County School Board, was a founding board member of the Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore and the Northampton Housing Trust, and helped launch the Virginia Eastern Shore Economic Empowerment and Housing Corporation; and

WHEREAS, Ruth Wise received numerous honors for her community development efforts, including a 2001 Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World award, a Fannie Mae Foundation Maxwell Award, and a best practices award from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; and

WHEREAS, a woman of strong and abiding faith, Ruth Wise was a lifelong member of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, where she worked as a hostess and mistress of ceremonies and helped organize programs on African American history; and

WHEREAS, Ruth Wise will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by her husband, Larry Kellam; her children, Ava, Marcus, Malachi, and Iysha, and their families; her stepchildren, Rodney, Laversa, and Larry; and many other family members, friends, and Eastern Shore residents; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Ruth Ann Rogers Wise Kellam, a talented educator and activist who worked tirelessly in support of the residents of the Eastern Shore; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Ruth Ann Rogers Wise Kellam as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for her memory.

INTRODUCED

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