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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 884

Offered February 11, 2019

Commending Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

Patrons—Freitas; Senator: Reeves

WHEREAS, for 160 years, Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Locust Grove has served the members of the Orange County community by providing spiritual leadership, generous outreach programs, and opportunities for joyful worship; and

WHEREAS, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the citizens of the Gordon District in Orange County who would become the congregation of Mt. Zion Baptist Church gathered to praise God through prayer, song, and testimony; and

WHEREAS, the early ancestors of Mt. Zion Baptist Church were many and consisted of members of the Armstead, Broadus, Brooks, Carter, Cottoms, Henderson, Johnson, Lewis, Minor, and Vass families, with birth dates as early as 1810; descendants of those families remain members and loyal supporters of the church; and

WHEREAS, initially, the residents formed a Prayer Band in the home of Maria Armstead and Peter Armstead, the congregation's first known spiritual leader, in an area referred to as Peter Bottom, near Indiantown Road in Locust Grove; and

WHEREAS, the Prayer Band's next place of worship was a brush arbor built on a corner lot subsequently purchased by Nathan Henderson and his wife, Betsy, with the Reverend John C. Willis, Jr., a white minister, as the principal speaker; and

WHEREAS, in Mt. Zion Baptist Church's early days, many members walked to worship services and others traveled by horseback and carriages from the neighboring communities of Lewistown, Peter Bottom, Fox Neck, and Flat Run; and

WHEREAS, as the church community grew in numbers and spirituality, Prayer Band members decided to divide the travel distance and move from Indiantown Road in Lewistown to property owned by Abe Roach on Governor Almond Road, where the congregation erected a log cabin; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Peter Armstead continued as the Prayer Band's leader until his death sometime prior to the 1860s; and

WHEREAS, in 1858, needing a larger sanctuary and unable to add to the log cabin, the Prayer Band moved to a property on land owned by Henry Willis, a few miles from the present location of Mt. Zion Baptist Church; during this period, the Reverend Robert Woodson, a traveling minister, served the congregation; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Wanzer Tibbs, also a traveling minister, was the Prayer Band's next spiritual leader; he named the new sanctuary Zion Baptist Church, later referred to as Mt. Zion Baptist Church (Colored) and formally changed to Mt. Zion Baptist Church on November 5, 2000; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend James A. Robinson of Spotsylvania became the first official pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church and served the congregation for 33 years, from 1895 to 1928, and established the Church's first Sunday school and Usher Board; and

WHEREAS, the next pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the Reverend Robert L. Harris, served from approximately 1930 to 1951, and oversaw the baptism of many new members in Floyd Hicks' farm pond; and

WHEREAS, in 1951, the Reverend Ellis W. Yancey was elected pastor and designed and began the construction of a new church; groundbreaking services took place in 1954, and Benny Carter of Spotsylvania was the builder; and

WHEREAS, in 1957, the Reverend Charles H. Sanford was elected as pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church and under his leadership the new building was completed; on May 5, 1962, Floyd E. Hicks and Mabel E. Hicks conveyed to Wyman H. Johnson and MacNeire Johnson, as trustees, the land on which the church currently stands; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Winston L. Brock, who guided Mt. Zion Baptist Church from 1981 to 1995, was an inspirational and motivational leader who greatly improved and enhanced the church building and grounds; he was succeeded by the Reverend Ernest Woodson, who was pastor from 1996 to 1997; and

WHEREAS, on November 13, 1996, the interior of Mt. Zion Baptist Church suffered fire damage; deacons Howard Roberts, MacNeire Johnson, George Price, and Clarence Washington and sisters Betty Roberts and Joan Washington were instrumental in overseeing the restoration; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Dr. Robert C. Stone, pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church from 2000 to 2006, was a man who walked among his people and appointed two associate ministers, the Reverend

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Eddie Naylor and the Reverend Alan Watkins, to better serve the congregation; and

WHEREAS, the current pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the Reverend Sanford Reaves, Jr., joined the church in 2007 and continues to answer God's call to grow the congregation both physically and spiritually and preach the gospel to the people; and

WHEREAS, throughout the history of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the members of the congregation have upheld their commitment to serve the Lord by believing, trusting, praising, and growing in their spiritual faith; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Mt. Zion Baptist Church on the occasion of its 160th 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 Sanford Reaves, Jr., pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the church's unique place in local history and contributions to the Locust Grove community.