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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 91

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 7, 2020

Affirming the Commonwealth's commitment to diversity and safeguarding the civil rights and dignity of all Virginians.

Patron—Lopez

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, in recent years, there has been a sense of uncertainty and fear among many communities across our Commonwealth and the nation; and

WHEREAS, America is a nation of immigrants, a great melting pot of every racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious group and every nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and gender; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report for 2016 released in the fall of 2017 documented over 6,100 incidents and over 7,600 victims of hate crimes, noting that 57.5 percent of reported single-bias incidents were motivated by race, ethnicity, or ancestry and that 50.2 percent of such attacks were targeted toward African Americans, 21 percent of victims were assaulted on the basis of their religion, 17.7 percent of victims were assailed because of their sexual orientation, 2.0 percent were targeted for their gender identity, 1.2 percent were attacked due to their disability, and 0.5 percent were assaulted because of their gender; and

WHEREAS, from 2015 to 2016, such hate crimes based on religion increased 13.6 percent, including a 17.9 percent increase in reported anti-Jewish crimes and a 19.5 percent increase in crimes against Muslims; and

WHEREAS, the constitutional right to freedom of religion is a cherished American value, and violence or hate speech toward any American on the basis of his faith conflicts with the nation's founding principles; and

WHEREAS, racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity is America's greatest strength and makes the country enviable among other nations; America depends upon the contributions of all citizens, and the New American and immigrant communities have made innumerable contributions to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of American society; and

WHEREAS, the rise of hateful and intolerant acts of bigotry against New Americans, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, LGBTQ Americans, Americans with disabilities, and other racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities is fueled by ignorance and isolationism; racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious intolerance is abhorrent and disrespectful of American beliefs, devalues American principles, weakens democracy and the nation's standing as a world leader, and harms victims, their families, and communities; and

WHEREAS, the inalienable rights and dignity of all American citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, faith, beliefs, culture, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity should be steadfastly affirmed and protected, and acts of racial animus, intolerance, intimidation, and violence must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law to ensure the free expression of faith and the unfettered practice of religion as the founding fathers envisioned; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's diverse population consists of both native-born citizens and immigrants whose collective cultures, religions, backgrounds, orientations, abilities, and perspectives combine to form a pluralistic community that welcomes persons and families of all backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, Virginia should be a safe place for immigrants from all countries, people of color, Jews, Muslims, other religious minorities, LGBTQ people, women, and persons with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth must assure its vulnerable communities that they are supported and that it is committed to maintaining and improving their quality of life and will not tolerate acts of hate, discrimination, bullying, harassment, or any type of intimidation against them; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has a strong tradition and mission of embracing and valuing diversity and respecting the civil and human rights of all residents, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ability, or immigration status; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's large immigrant population contributes to the social fabric and economic growth of the state, and it is the Commonwealth's intent to ensure that immigrant residents participate freely in civic life and daily activities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby affirm the Commonwealth's commitment to diversity and safeguarding the civil rights and dignity of all Virginians; and, be it

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59 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the General Assembly denounce hate speech, hate crimes, harassment,
60 racial bias, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-immigrant activity, harmful bias, and discrimination in all
61 forms; and, be it

62 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Commonwealth remain committed to diversity and fostering an
63 atmosphere of inclusiveness that respects the dignity and worth of every person without regard to race,
64 ethnicity, gender, religion, ancestry, national origin, immigration status, marital status, age, disability,
65 sexual orientation, gender identity, or familial status; and, be it

66 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the General Assembly call upon all citizens and residents and state
67 employees to resist and oppose acts of intimidation, bullying, discrimination, and violence and support
68 victims of such acts; and, be it

69 RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution
70 to the Secretary of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Executive Director of the
71 State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this
72 resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General
73 Assembly in this matter.