

2020 SPECIAL SESSION I

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 608

Celebrating the life of Saba Labib Shami.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, October 2, 2020

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami, a highly respected public servant and member of the Arab American community, battled a rare form of sinus cancer and fell short of full victory over it, passing away surrounded by his family on September 17, 2020; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami more importantly battled injustice against himself and the Palestinian people, and he found a way to channel that passion to touch everything around him in his day-to-day life, from local government in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, to statewide Virginia governance, and all the way up to the international diplomacy arena; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami was born an indigenous Christian Palestinian on April 15, 1955, in the village of Maghar and grew up and went to school in the City of Haifa, which is near where Jesus Christ grew up in Galilee, while he and his father worked as painters; and

WHEREAS, while attending high school in Haifa, Saba Labib Shami organized against his school's segregation of Jews and Palestinians, leading to his expulsion from the Israeli education system in its entirety for doing so; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami moved to the United States, settling first in Indiana, so that he could complete high school and then earn a bachelor's degree in social sciences from Goshen College; he studied philosophy and peace studies at Bethany Theological Seminary, all while being a proficient and fluent speaker of Arabic but not having the strongest English language skills, and many years later, he graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University's Virginia Executive Institute; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami moved to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in 1983 to begin his career as the Director of Marketing and Assistant Editor of the publication *Arab Traveler* at ArAme Trading and Publishing Company; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami made a professional career shift into the world of finance in 1989, when he took the position of vice president of business development at the Bank of Northern Virginia in Arlington; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami made another professional career shift in 1993 to lobbying and public affairs as a principal at Washington Works, LLC; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami then moved into public service in local and state government by working as the Chief Deputy Commissioner for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Director of the Virginia Taskforce for Business Development with the Near East; Special Assistant to the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, where he founded the Office of Outreach and served as its first director; Director of Special Projects for the Virginia Port Authority; Chief Deputy Director of the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation; member of the Virginia Small Business Advisory Board; and member of the Board of Directors of Arlington Home Ownership Made Easier (AHOME); and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami assisted and served Senator and Governor Tim Kaine, Senator and Governor Mark Warner, Congressman Jim Moran, Congressman and Lieutenant Governor Don Beyer, and many other Virginia local and state elected officials; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami founded and sat on the board of directors for a number of charities and political action committees, including The Galilee Fund, New Dominion PAC, and the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami pursued a lifelong commitment to advocacy for peace and justice in Israel-Palestine, including equal rights and human rights for the Palestinian and Israeli people; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami spoke many dialects of Arabic, which made him a very popular speaker in Arab American forums, at other functions, in print, and on television; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami is survived by his wife, Amira Mazzawi Shami, his younger son, Amir Shami, and his eldest son, Yousef Shami; and

WHEREAS, Saba Labib Shami needs everyone's prayers to make his passing easy for his family in these tough times; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Delegates hereby note with great sadness the loss of Saba Labib Shami, who dedicated years of exemplary service to many communities and citizens of Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Saba Labib Shami as an expression of the House of Delegates' respect for his memory and admiration for his extraordinary dedication to human rights and justice.

ENROLLED

HR608ER