

2022 SPECIAL SESSION I

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 727

Commemorating the life and legacy of the Honorable Alfred William Harris.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, June 17, 2022

WHEREAS, the Honorable Alfred William Harris, a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates who introduced the bill that chartered what is now Virginia State University, died on March 24, 1920; and

WHEREAS, Alfred Harris was born and raised in Fairfax County, at the site of what is today Bull Run Regional Park; and

WHEREAS, the Harris family were descendants of those emancipated in the 1790s by Robert Carter III and allowed to become landowners; and

WHEREAS, Alfred Harris' family relocated to Alexandria during the Civil War; after the war, he attended segregated public schools in the city and worked as a staff member of two local newspapers, then studied law with a local Black attorney; and

WHEREAS, Alfred Harris was admitted to practice law by the Corporation Court of the City of Alexandria in 1880, and he earned a legal degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C., the following year; and

WHEREAS, Alfred Harris became active in the Republican Party and served in local government in Alexandria, then moved to Petersburg, where he practiced law as likely the only Black attorney in the city at the time; and

WHEREAS, desirous to be of further service to the community, Alfred Harris ran for and was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1881; he represented Dinwiddie County for eight years, winning by comfortable margins in each of his elections; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure as a state lawmaker, Alfred Harris offered his leadership to the Committee for Courts of Justice and several other standing committees; he introduced and supported numerous important pieces of legislation to benefit his constituents, increase funding for public schools, and enhance accountability in local and state government; and

WHEREAS, notably, Alfred Harris introduced the bill that created the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, now known as Virginia State University, the Commonwealth's first public college for Black students; he passed legislation to incorporate the Colored Agricultural and Industrial Association of Virginia to sponsor a state fair for Black Virginians; and

WHEREAS, in 1889, Alfred Harris was appointed as a special customs inspector in Newport News and did not seek reelection to the Virginia House of Delegates; he remained active in politics, opposing efforts to force Black Republicans out of party offices in the early 1900s; and

WHEREAS, Alfred Harris and his wife, Ida, raised five sons and one daughter, and he continued living in Petersburg until the time of his passing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and remarkable legacy of the Honorable Alfred William Harris as a champion of education and rights hereby be commemorated on the occasion of the 102nd anniversary of his death; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to descendants of the Honorable Alfred William Harris as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for his achievements as a public servant and respect for his memory.

ENROLLED

HR727ER