

2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 599

Commending the 246 Years Project.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 6, 2023
Agreed to by the Senate, February 9, 2023

WHEREAS, the 246 Years Project, a collaboration between the historic Morven Park and the Loudoun County Circuit Court Clerk's Office, is striving to make pre-Civil War historical records about enslaved people more accessible to amateur genealogists and members of the public; and

WHEREAS, the 246 Years Project was originally conceived in 2016 by Jana Shafagoj, the director of preservation for Morven Park in Loudoun County, the historic home of former Governor Westmoreland Davis, when she recognized that many Black amateur genealogists encountered difficulties obtaining family records prior to 1865; and

WHEREAS, the 246 Years Project takes its name from the period between the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown in 1619, to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and the abolition of slavery in 1865; during this time, enslaved people were excluded from government records and census data, making it difficult to trace family lineages before the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, Jana Shafagoj discussed the project with historians, genealogy experts, local officials, and the Historic House Museum Consortium of Washington, D.C., which represents 40 historic homes and sites open to the public in the national capital region of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia; however, work on the project was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, when Stacey Metcalfe became the executive director of Morven Park in December 2020, she made the completion of the 246 Years Project a priority and sought the assistance of Gary Clemens, the clerk of the Loudoun County Circuit Court, who, with his Historic Records Division team, maintains one of the most complete collections of historical records in the Commonwealth and has established beneficial partnerships with local libraries and museums; and

WHEREAS, the 246 Years Project is developing a free-to-access online database that helps members of the public trace their family history further back than has typically been possible by supplementing official government records with unofficial data on enslaved people that was kept by private households throughout the region; and

WHEREAS, the 246 Years Project expects to be fully operational by the end of 2023, and there are plans to expand the database to include not only former residents of Loudoun County, but other areas of Northern Virginia and the Commonwealth in the future; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the 246 Years Project for its work to make historical and family records more accessible; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the 246 Years Project as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for the project's important mission.

ENROLLED

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