

2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 680

Commemorating the life and legacy of Reuben E. Lawson.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2023
Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 2023

WHEREAS, Reuben E. Lawson was an accomplished civil rights attorney from Roanoke who represented the Roanoke branch of the NAACP and local plaintiffs in many pivotal civil rights cases in Southwest Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson graduated from the Howard University School of Law in 1945 and thereafter began practicing law in his hometown of Roanoke out of an office building he built for himself, which stands to this day; and

WHEREAS, as an attorney with the Roanoke branch of the NAACP, Reuben Lawson worked closely with the organization's executive board to advocate for desegregation before the Roanoke City School Board; and

WHEREAS, in his quest for social justice, Reuben Lawson filed and argued a number of significant cases in the United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia challenging the de facto segregation enabled by the Commonwealth's policy of Massive Resistance; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson notably filed the first desegregation suit in Southwest Virginia with *Walker v. Floyd County School Board*, a case that resulted in 13 African American students gaining admittance to schools that had previously only enrolled white students; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson subsequently achieved similar success in the Cities of Roanoke and Lynchburg and the Counties of Pulaski, Grayson, and Roanoke, contributing greatly to the integration of schools in Southwest Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson's tenacious advocacy helped bring an end to segregation at the former Victory Stadium in Roanoke after a 1961 National Football League exhibition game prompted him to take the matter before the Roanoke City Council while other community leaders affiliated with the NAACP organized a boycott; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson held prominent positions in various social and fraternal organizations in the Roanoke community over the years, including the Roanoke Civic League, for which he served as vice president; and

WHEREAS, Reuben Lawson was a mentor to many over his career and gave educational talks for the benefit of others at locations such as the Gainsboro Branch of the Roanoke City Public Library; and

WHEREAS, though less heralded today than some of his contemporaries in the civil rights movement, Reuben Lawson's efforts to end segregation in Southwest Virginia are worthy of the highest regard; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commemorate the life and legacy of Reuben E. Lawson, a champion for racial justice and equality whose steadfast dedication to his cause had a transformative impact on the communities of Southwest 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 Reuben E. Lawson as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for his contributions to the Commonwealth.

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