

2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 785

Celebrating the life of Charles Somerville Harris.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 21, 2023
Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 2023

WHEREAS, Charles Somerville Harris, a trailblazing education administrator who inspired, mentored, and helped shape the careers of hundreds of students, colleagues, and friends, most recently as executive vice president of Averett University, died on December 7, 2022; and

WHEREAS, a graduate of West End High School in Mecklenburg County, Charles Harris earned a bachelor's degree in mass media arts from what is now Hampton University in 1973, then began his career with the university as a media services employee at the nursing school; and

WHEREAS, after a brief internship at *Newsweek*, Charles Harris enrolled in the University of Michigan's graduate program in journalism in 1974 and concurrently took a position in the university's Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, rising to the position of assistant director of athletics; and

WHEREAS, in 1979, Charles Harris joined the University of Pennsylvania as its director of intercollegiate athletics and recreation, becoming the first Black athletic director at an Ivy League school and the youngest person to serve in that capacity in the history of the conference; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris next became the director of athletics at Arizona State University, making history again as the first Black athletic director of a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I program; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris and his wife, Lenora, formed the consulting practice Excel Development Systems, Inc., now UbuntuGlobal, in 1986 to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion worldwide; and

WHEREAS, from 1996 to 2003, Charles Harris served as commissioner of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, greatly supporting historically Black colleges and universities throughout the southeastern and mid-Atlantic United States; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris was named director of athletics at Averett University in 2004, and he subsequently took on the additional title of vice president of student services three years later and then the title of executive vice president shortly thereafter, becoming the first Black person to hold these titles in the history of the institution; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris retired from Averett University in 2021, leaving a storied career in which he served on nearly 30 NCAA committees, including as chair of the NCAA Division I Management Council in 2002 and as a member of the NCAA men's basketball selection committee from 1992 to 1999; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of his professional accomplishments, Charles Harris was presented with a plethora of accolades over his career, including the Pioneer Award from the National Association of College Directors of Athletics' McLendon Foundation in 2010; to preserve his legacy at the institution, Averett University announced in 2016 that its new athletic field house will be named the Charles S. Harris Field House in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris was an active member of his community, serving on the boards of several local banks, as well as with organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Greensboro Sports Commission, the Danville-Pittsylvania County chapter of Habitat for Humanity, and the Foundation Board of the Danville Science Center; and

WHEREAS, Charles Harris will be fondly remembered and dearly missed by his loving wife of 48 years, Lenora; his sister, Lillian; and numerous other family members, friends, and colleagues; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Charles Somerville Harris, whose pioneering spirit and steadfast leadership affected countless lives; 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 Charles Somerville Harris as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

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