

2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 347

Celebrating the life of William T. Mason, Jr.

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

WHEREAS, William T. Mason, Jr., a pioneering civil rights attorney who left a legacy of contributions to the Norfolk community, the Commonwealth, and the United States, died on February 1, 2023; and

WHEREAS, William Mason was born on July 27, 1926, in Norfolk and was the only child of the late Vivian Carter Mason, a well-known social worker and civic leader who was the first African American woman appointed to the Norfolk School Board, and the late William T. Mason, Sr., a well-known real estate dealer, insurance executive, and administrator of Norfolk Community Hospital; and

WHEREAS, William Mason attended Virginia Union University for his first year of college, then transferred to Colby College in Waterville, Maine, on the advice of one of his high school teachers; and

WHEREAS, after receiving his bachelor's degree from Colby College in 1947, William Mason earned a law degree from Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C., in 1950, then became a member of the Virginia State Bar in 1951; he started his practice of real estate law after moving back to Norfolk, where he also served as counsel for the Attucks Theatre; and

WHEREAS, in 1963, William Mason was appointed by President John F. Kennedy to serve as the first African American assistant United States Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia, in which capacity he was based in Norfolk and worked on school desegregation cases as well as criminal and civil matters; he was employed there until July 1972; and

WHEREAS, William Mason participated in the founding of Norfolk's first prominent multiracial legal practice, Mason, Robinson, Eichler and Zaleskie; Oliver Hill and Samuel Tucker, two renowned civil rights attorneys from Richmond, sought his wise advice on civil rights cases, and he worked as a cooperating attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., a civil rights litigation firm Thurgood Marshall established in New York before becoming a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States; and

WHEREAS, William Mason was the oldest living member of the Old Dominion Bar Association and president emeritus of the South Hampton Roads Bar Association, and he fulfilled his duties as the living historian; he was also a member of the Virginia State Bar for 71 years and is considered one of the many unsung heroes of the civil rights movement for his promotion of democratic values and his commitment to removing barriers to fair elections like the poll tax; and

WHEREAS, William Mason's passion for community leadership guided him to become a board member of the Norfolk Community Hospital Association, the Norfolk United Way, the Urban League of Hampton Roads, Inc., the Twin City Bar Association, the Old Dominion Bar Association, the Southern Regional Council, the Norfolk State University Foundation, Inc., and the Board of Visitors for Colby College and a director of the Crispus Attucks Cultural Center, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, William Mason has received numerous awards and accolades for his contributions to the Hampton Roads legal community and his dedication to justice, including the Old Dominion Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, a proclamation from Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Cooper Alexander, recognition in the Supreme Court of Virginia's Judicial Learning Center, the *New Journal and Guide's* Impacting Lives Award, and the Member of the Year Award from the South Hampton Roads Bar Association; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Delegates hereby note with great sadness the loss of William T. Mason, Jr., a trailblazing attorney who touched countless lives through his kindness and legal acumen; 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 William T. Mason, Jr., as an expression of the House of Delegates' respect for his memory and admiration for his personal and professional achievements and many years of service and dedication to the Norfolk community, the Commonwealth, and the United States.

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