

## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 378

*Commemorating the life and legacy of the Honorable Richard Gault Leslie Paige.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 22, 2023

WHEREAS, the Honorable Richard Gault Leslie Paige was a Republican member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1871 to 1875 and 1879 to 1882 and was possibly one of the first African American lawyers in the City of Norfolk and in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige was born into slavery on May 31, 1846, in the City of Norfolk; in 1857, he fled to freedom and headed to Philadelphia, where he adopted the middle name "Leslie" in appreciation of the abolitionist who assisted him on his journey; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige reached his final destination in Boston; during his 10 years there, he received an education and began to acquire knowledge about the law from George Stillman Hillard, an abolitionist who sponsored him, as well as attorney George L. Ruffin, a Richmonder who was one of the first African Americans to graduate from Harvard and the first African American judge in Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige returned to the Commonwealth in 1870 with his new family, including his wife, Lillie, and his nine children, settling in Norfolk County's small town of Berkley, which would be annexed by the City of Norfolk in 1906; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige and his two brothers had collaborated on purchasing land in Norfolk County in 1868; around this time they bought and sold various lots of land that led to the purchase of what is now the historical African American burial ground Mount Olive Cemetery, which had once been known as Paige Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige ran and won an election in 1871 to the Virginia House of Delegates for a two-year term representing Norfolk County and served on the Committee on Propositions and Grievances; once reelected for his second term in 1873, he served on the Committee on Retrenchment and Economy; and

WHEREAS, on January 17, 1872, R.G.L. Paige presided over a meeting of African American legislators that appointed a six-member committee, of which he was a member, to travel to Washington, D.C., and petition the United States Congress to pass a pending civil rights bill; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige was one of the secretaries of the Republican State Convention in April 1872, and was a delegate to the Republican National Convention that met in Philadelphia and nominated Ulysses S. Grant for president; he was also elected president of the party's state convention in July 1873; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige was given a patronage appointment on June 1, 1874, as an assistant clerk at the customs house in Norfolk; he remained there for several years and advanced to the positions of clerk and inspector; and

WHEREAS, in a three-person race, R.G.L. Paige again received the majority of the votes and was reelected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1879; he gave a speech against lynching in 1880 that was extensively reproduced, but no law came of it; he also vowed to sue a Richmond theatrical group that turned him away that year, but ultimately decided against it; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige worked as secretary of the curators at what was then Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, now Hampton University, from 1882 until 1885; he was a founding member of the board of directors of the Virginia Building and Savings Association and assisted with the implementation of the legislation that had established the association in 1882; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige served on many committees and in many prominent roles for the duration of his career, while remaining active in Republican Party politics; he was selected as an alternate delegate to the 1888 Republican National Convention at the state convention that same year; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige's reputation was such that several individuals from the Commonwealth and North Carolina nominated him for the job of promoting an exhibition for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which was being lobbied for by African Americans across the nation; and

WHEREAS, in September 1904, R.G.L. Paige died of peritonitis at his home in Berkley; he owned at least 10 properties and five buildings in Berkley and Norfolk County with a total taxable value of more than \$6,500 at the time of his death; and

WHEREAS, R.G.L. Paige was laid to rest in the nearby Mount Olive Cemetery; his wife, Lillie, erected a 12-foot tall engraved obelisk over his grave and cherished his memory until she died as well, on April 27, 1913; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and legacy of the Honorable Richard Gault Leslie Paige hereby be commemorated to honor the attorney and delegate's contributions and dedicated

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service to the former Norfolk County, now the Hampton Roads Region, the House of Delegates, and the Commonwealth; 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 the Honorable Richard Gault Leslie Paige as an expression of the House of Delegates' high regard for his place in the history of the Commonwealth.