

## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 397

*Commemorating the life and legacy of Walter Nathaniel Ridley, Ed.D.*

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

WHEREAS, Walter Nathaniel Ridley, Ed.D., a pioneering educator and education administrator, made history as the first Black graduate from the University of Virginia and as the first Black student to receive an academic doctoral degree from a traditionally white college or university in the South; and

WHEREAS, born in Newport News to the son of a formerly enslaved person, Walter Ridley graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in psychology from Howard University in 1931, then earned a master's degree in educational administration from the institution two years later; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley joined the faculty at what is now Virginia State University as a professor of psychology and director of extension, where he fostered the academic pursuits of an untold number of students over the next 21 years; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley sought admission to the University of Virginia (UVA) as early as the 1940s, but was initially denied, leading him to further his studies at the University of Minnesota, where he studied how audiovisual materials used in classrooms impacted Black students; and

WHEREAS, in 1950, the case *Swanson v. Rector of Visitors* was judged in favor of Gregory Swanson, who became the first Black student to be admitted to UVA; health issues compelled Walter Ridley to return to the Commonwealth around the same time, and when he subsequently applied for admission to UVA he was accepted, matriculating at the institution in 1951; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley became a member of the Kappa Delta Pi honor society at UVA and graduated with a doctoral degree in education in 1953, an historic accomplishment that drew the attention of local and national media; and

WHEREAS, after briefly serving as the academic dean at the former Saint Paul's College, Walter Ridley became president of what was then Elizabeth City State College in 1958, helping the institution grow in significant ways over his tenure toward becoming a fully accredited institution in the University of North Carolina system by 1969, a year after he left the institution; in honor of his contributions, he was named president emeritus of the institution in 1988; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley devoted himself to advancing education in the nation, serving at different times as president, treasurer, and trustee of the American Teachers Association (ATA) between 1941 and 1966, before the ATA was merged with the National Education Association (NEA) following the desegregation of the organizations; he also served on the commission that oversaw the merger of the ATA and NEA, notably providing a keynote address at the historic merger dinner; and

WHEREAS, in the final years of his career, Walter Ridley served as a professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, where he chaired the Department of Secondary Education and Professional Studies and retired in 1980, thereafter becoming professor emeritus; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley's notable professional, academic, and civic affiliations over the years included the Alpha Kappa Mu honor society, for which he served as national president; the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; the Antioch College Board of Trustees; the Save the Children Federation; Virginia Academy of Science; and the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association's Presidents Council, which he served for 10 years and led for four; and

WHEREAS, in addition to receiving the Meritorious Service Award for his 25 years as a national officer of ATA, Walter Ridley was also recognized with UVA's Distinguished Curry School Alumnus Award in 1988; today, the Ridley Scholars Program and Ridley Hall at UVA serve to honor his achievements at the institution; and

WHEREAS, Walter Ridley died on September 26, 1996, leaving his wife, Henrietta, and his children, Yolanda and Don, and their families to cherish his memory, as well as an extraordinary legacy that will inspire others for generations to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and legacy of Walter Nathaniel Ridley, Ed.D., the first Black graduate of the University of Virginia, hereby be commemorated on the 70th anniversary of his historic achievement; 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 Walter Nathaniel Ridley, Ed.D., as an expression of the House of Delegates' high regard for his place in history and his many contributions to the Commonwealth.