

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA -- 1999 SESSION

ENROLLED

## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 771

*On the death of Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 29, 1999

Agreed to by the Senate, February 4, 1999

WHEREAS, Spottswood W. Robinson III of Richmond, an influential civil rights lawyer, former dean of the Howard University Law School, and the first African American to serve as chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals in Washington, died on October 11, 1998; and

WHEREAS, a native of Richmond, Spottswood Robinson graduated from Virginia Union University in three years and at age 20 entered Howard University's Law School at the right time to be influenced by Charles Hamilton Houston, who was in the process of creating a body of civil rights law that would later bring about great change; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Howard and leaving an academic record that remains unmatched 60 years later, Spottswood Robinson established, with Oliver Hill and the late Martin A. Martin, a Richmond law firm that became, and still is, one of the most influential in the city; and

WHEREAS, with Oliver Hill and the late Thurgood Marshall, Spottswood Robinson argued civil rights cases throughout Virginia and the south, ultimately arguing and winning the landmark *Brown vs. The Board of Education* case that outlawed enforced racial segregation in public schools; and

WHEREAS, Spottswood Robinson participated in important civil rights cases that outlawed segregated seating on interstate buses, opened Virginia state parks to African-American residents, and abolished real estate covenants that barred house sales to African Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1960 Spottswood Robinson was named dean of the Howard University Law School and served on the United States Civil Rights Commission until he was nominated by President Kennedy for the federal bench; and

WHEREAS, in 1964 Judge Robinson was sworn in as the third African-American federal district judge in American history, and three years later he was nominated by President Johnson as the first African-American United States Court of Appeals judge; and

WHEREAS, Judge Robinson served as chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia from 1981 until 1986 and continued to serve as senior judge until his retirement in 1992; and

WHEREAS, during his long and extraordinarily productive career, Judge Spottswood Robinson went from brilliant law student to history-making lawyer to distinguished federal judge, all the while retaining his meticulous, scholarly approach to the law, his unquestioned courage in defending it, and his warm and modest demeanor; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly note with great sadness the passing of one of the few remaining civil rights giants, Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III; 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 Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III as an expression of the deep and abiding respect in which his memory is held by the members of the General Assembly and the people of Virginia.

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