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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 118

Offered January 14, 2008

Celebrating the life of Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr.

Patrons—Marsh, Barker, Deeds, Edwards, Herring, Locke, Lucas, McEachin, Miller, J.C., Miller, Y.B., Northam, Petersen, Puckett, Puller, Ticer and Whipple

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr., native son, beloved dentist, and local historian, born on February 28, 1921, entered into eternal peace and joy on January 6, 2008; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr., the youngest of six sons and one daughter, was born in Clay Ward, a section of Richmond City, and was reared in a large and loving family by parents who instilled a love of learning, a spirit of enterprise and service, respect for self and others, and a foundation of virtues upon which his character was formed; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. grew up during a time when the realities of the Jim Crow racial caste system forged unity, self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and a strong sense of family and community throughout African-American neighborhoods, and he was inspired by a rich and long legacy of family achievements to overcome the limitations and challenges imposed by the socio-legal infrastructure designed to relegate African Americans to second-class citizenship; and

WHEREAS, he began his education in Richmond at Monroe School, the home of the Sixth Virginia Volunteers, a Black unit for the Spanish-American War, graduated from Armstrong High School, completed his undergraduate degree at Virginia Union University in 1942, and earned his doctor of dental science degree from Howard University School of Dentistry in 1946; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. served as a captain in the United States Army Dental Corps during World War II and practiced dentistry in the Philippines and Guam during his tour of duty; following his distinguished military service, he established his dental practice in historic Jackson Ward in Richmond in 1948 where he practiced until his retirement in 1989; and

WHEREAS, after a long and illustrious career as a dentist, he became a professor of general-practice dentistry and an admissions advisor at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. was an unchallenged aficionado of Richmond and Virginia history; he shared his storytelling talents with people from all generations and walks of life; and he was a kind and compassionate dentist, who connected with patients young and old and often soothed the fears of children with magic tricks and toys; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. devoted himself to community service and participated as a member or officer of numerous boards, committees, and organizations, among them the Historic Richmond Foundation, Richmond School Board, the Virginia Center for the Book, Virginia Board of Dentistry, Richmond Area Community Council, the Virginia Health Regulatory Board, the Richmond Public Library Board, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Maggie L. Walker Foundation, Astoria Beneficial Club, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, and Crusade for Voters; his family established the Foster Family Fund to receive donations for the African-American collection at the Richmond Public Library; and he was instrumental in the creation of the Virginia Authors Room at the Library of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, honored for his outstanding professional work as a dentist and commitment to community service, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. received numerous awards, commendations, and accolades during his lifetime, including the distinguished alumnus of an Historically Black College and University Award in 2001, the Urban League of Greater Richmond's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003, the first Semper Virginia Society Award by the Library of Virginia Foundation in 2004, and the Dominion Resources Strong Men and Women of Excellence Award in 2006; and

WHEREAS, a teacher, clinician, historian, sage, coalition-builder, and a mentor and father figure to young people, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. was a pillar of the community whose life was characterized by humility, courtesy, trust, integrity, honesty, loyalty, and service; and

WHEREAS, throughout his life, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. earnestly endeavored to live by three tenets he learned from his father: (i) "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice"; (ii) "There's not a right way to do a wrong thing"; and (iii) "Being a good neighbor in community service is a rent we pay for being here"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr., an affable gentleman of remarkable intellect who exuded quiet, dignified elegance, led a life of personal integrity, unblemished service, civic leadership, professional excellence, and unabashed commitment to faith and family; and

WHEREAS, bereft family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and many others who loved and knew him are flooded with sweet memories and sorrow, and although the community has been diminished by his departure, Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. leaves a legacy worthy of emulation; now, therefore, be it

58 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
59 note with great sadness the loss of Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr.; and, be it
60 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for
61 presentation to the family of Dr. Francis Merrill Foster, Sr. as an expression of the General Assembly's
62 abiding respect and esteem for his memory and lifetime contributions to Richmond and the
63 Commonwealth.