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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 417

Offered March 2, 2016

Celebrating the life of Mathew Daniel Frank.

Patrons—Peace, Aird, Bagby, Boysko, Carr, Farrell, Kory, Lopez, Massie, McClellan, McQuinn, Murphy, Plum, Price, Rasoul and Toscano; Senators: Dunnivant, McDougle and McEachin

WHEREAS, Mathew Daniel Frank of Hanover County, son to Joanna and Keith Frank, brother to Tyler and Michelle Frank, and deeply loved by all who had the opportunity to be impacted by his short, but tremendous life, died on January 19, 2006, at the young age of nine; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank, a twin brother to Tyler Frank, was born in Long Island, New York, on September 20, 1996, and relocated with his family to Hanover County in 2000 at the age of three; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank was officially diagnosed with autism in 2000, and through the advocacy of his family, he helped pave the way for many children and families to receive support services and gain access to programs that were otherwise unavailable before he moved to Hanover County; and

WHEREAS, in 2000, Mathew Frank's family was one of the first families in Hanover County to appeal to the Commonwealth for what was then known as an MR support waiver; Mathew Frank and his twin, Tyler, were the first children in Hanover to receive this waiver, which would later open the door for Hanover County to add other children to the waivers and provide in-home services; this waiver program was the impetus that enabled more than 100 one-on-one in-home staff members to work alongside Mathew Frank for more than six years; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank was a little boy of fierce determination and had the amazing ability to break down walls between people and knit hearts together; his curiosity was never ending and he loved people of all different cultures, demographics, and ages; he loved to explore his community and interact with the people in it; and he was particularly fond of service people, their awesome vehicles, and their role in the community, which fascinated him; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank also enjoyed music, his dog, Jesse, and computer games and movies; one of his many talents was being a fantastic impressionist; he could quote movies all day long and giggle to himself at his voices and gimmicks, but the best impression he did was to reflect the beauty of love; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank gave so much love wherever he went, and his little soul had great depth and tremendous grace; his interaction with his community was always powerful, and he taught so many people about the struggle of autism and the beautiful souls that existed behind the diagnosis; and

WHEREAS, the realities of Mathew Frank's disabilities inspired his mother, Joanna Frank, to begin a number of programs in Hanover County seeking to give Mathew an equal opportunity to obtain an education, play, grow, and exist as any other child would; these programs would also come to benefit many other children living in the community with similar disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the presence of Mathew and Tyler Frank helped bring about new plans in Hanover County schools to create autism programs in elementary, middle, and high schools; and

WHEREAS, in 2000, Mathew Frank was the first to receive a Project Life Saver watch, which contained a GPS tracking device to help local police find individuals with disabilities if they got lost or ran away; a police officer from Hanover County would visit Mathew Frank every month to change the batteries on the device, which was one of his favorite visits, as he built strong relationships with many Hanover County police officers; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, the program Saturday Sitters was initiated, providing one Saturday a month of respite care for parents who had a child five years of age or under with a disability; this free service brought together community volunteers to help support families across Hanover County, and the program is still operated by The ARC of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank's special needs also helped initiate specialized autism training for police officers, school resource officers, and first responders in Hanover County; each individual with autism is unique and requires specialized approaches to intervention from community helpers; and

WHEREAS, Mathew Frank's specialized needs also helped inspire the program "Quick Start," which was a database that would provide valuable background information to community helpers in Hanover County related to the special needs of children with disabilities; these programs have helped educate and equip hundreds of Hanover County first responders to safely interact and assist individuals and their families with autism and other similar disabilities; and

WHEREAS, another program that was inspired by Mathew Frank's remarkable young life was a specialized Sunday school class, referred to as "God's Music," which was designed to provide a music-based church curriculum for children with disabilities; the Sunday school class enabled parents to

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58 attend regular church services with the comfort of knowing their child with special needs was being
59 cared for in a loving, accepting, and safe environment; Mathew Frank was a regular attendee of "God's
60 Music" at Mechanicsville Christian Church and could often be found playing instruments and singing
61 songs with the program volunteers; and

62 WHEREAS, Mathew Frank loved music and often found it calming to his sensitive sensory and
63 central nervous system; inspired by the therapeutic effects of music, one of Mathew Frank's in-home
64 support staff designed a music outreach series for children and adults with disabilities, and musicians
65 from around Richmond volunteered their time to play music with the attendees during the summer; and

66 WHEREAS, the program ran for several years and provided a wonderful opportunity for families to
67 engage in music, but also served as a great source of awareness and education about disability services
68 for the community; and

69 WHEREAS, in 2005, Mathew Frank's mother, Joanna, having found great support from her church
70 family for her son and his peers, founded a nonprofit called the Resource Connection, Inc.; this
71 organization went on to help equip, educate, and empower congregations across Virginia to serve
72 individuals with disabilities, and more than 600 congregations and more than 1,000 leaders have
73 received training; and

74 WHEREAS, the Resource Connection, Inc., has a program called "Mathew's Light" which has
75 provided support to individuals with disabilities from around the world; support has come in the forms
76 of medical assistance, staff support services, and medical equipment to individuals living in Vietnam,
77 Germany, Niger, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, and the Dominican Republic; and

78 WHEREAS, the Mathew Frank Memorial Scholarship, which was founded in 2006, has provided 14
79 high school seniors, who faithfully volunteered to support individuals with disabilities, with college
80 scholarships; and

81 WHEREAS, the common thread of love and commitment to Mathew Frank's well-being has brought
82 tremendous awareness, services, and education to the overarching community and the field of autism and
83 disability support services; although just a child, Mathew Frank planted a seed of compassion in the
84 hearts of many, and his light will forever remain in the hearts of all those who loved and knew him;
85 now, therefore, be it

86 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
87 note with great sadness the loss of Mathew Daniel Frank; and, be it

88 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
89 for presentation to Joanna Frank, mother of Mathew Daniel Frank, as an expression of the General
90 Assembly's respect for his memory.