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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 418

Offered March 2, 2016

Celebrating the life of Tyler Michael Frank.

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

WHEREAS, Tyler Michael Frank of Hanover County, son to Joanna and Keith Frank, brother to Mathew and Michelle Frank, and deeply loved by all who had the opportunity to be impacted by his short, but tremendous life, died on March 13, 2015, at the young age of 18; and

WHEREAS, Tyler Frank, a twin with Mathew 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, Tyler Frank was officially diagnosed with autism in 1998, 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, Tyler 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; Tyler Frank and his twin, Mathew, 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 receive in-home services; this waiver program was the impetus that enabled more than 100 one-on-one in-home staff members to work alongside Tyler Frank for more than 15 years; and

WHEREAS, even as a young child, Tyler Frank taught many people how to love, play, persevere, give, and turn mundane activities into grand adventures; he found great joy in life's simple pleasures, reading books, watching his favorite movies, taking long car rides, and of course playing in the leaves; it was not uncommon for the staff who worked with Tyler Frank to claim that they had the best job in the world, and his smile, laugh, strength, and spirit compelled many to dedicate their lives and careers to serving and advocating for individuals with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, anyone who knew Tyler Frank and had the privilege of seeing life through his eyes understood a realm of the world sustained without judgment and a love that could humble the greatest of men; and

WHEREAS, the realities of Tyler Frank's disabilities inspired his mother, Joanna Frank, to begin a number of programs in Hanover County seeking to give him 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 Tyler and Mathew Frank helped bring about new plans in Hanover County schools to create autism programs in elementary, middle, and high schools; 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, and the program is still operated by The ARC of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Tyler 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; these programs have helped educate and equip hundreds of Hanover County community helpers to safely interact and assist individuals and their families with autism and other similar disabilities; and

WHEREAS, another program that was inspired by Tyler 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 attend regular church services with the comfort of knowing their child with special needs was being cared for in a loving, accepting, and safe environment; Tyler Frank was a regular attendee of "God's Music" at Mechanicsville Christian Church and could often be found listening intently to the music provided by its volunteers; and

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

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

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

63 WHEREAS, in late 2015, the Tyler Frank Memorial Scholarship was started to provide college
64 scholarships to students who will be studying to become first responders; and

65 WHEREAS, Tyler Frank was a treasured community member both in Hanover County and across the
66 disability services community in Virginia; the community supported him in numerous ways, from county
67 support services, FAPT teams, and community helpers to in-home staff, congregations, and local
68 businesses; today, SAMs Hot Dog Shop, which was Tyler Frank's favorite restaurant, has a memorial
69 table in his honor, which is used to provide free meals for the elderly or disabled community members
70 of Hanover County; and

71 WHEREAS, the common thread of love and commitment to Tyler Frank's wellbeing has brought
72 tremendous awareness, services, and education to the overarching community and the field of autism and
73 disability support services; he planted a seed of compassion in the hearts of many, and his light will
74 forever remain in the hearts of all those who loved and knew him; now, therefore, be it

75 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
76 note with great sadness the loss of Tyler Michael Frank; and, be it

77 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
78 for presentation to Joanna Frank, mother of Tyler Michael Frank, as an expression of the General
79 Assembly's respect for his memory.