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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 293

Offered February 18, 2018

Commending the Valentine First Freedom Center.

Patrons—Carr, Adams, D.M., McQuinn, Murphy, Peace, Plum, Robinson, Rodman, Sickles, Sullivan and VanValkenburg; Senators: Dunnavant, McClellan and McPike

WHEREAS, in 2018, the Valentine First Freedom Center in Richmond celebrates its 34th anniversary of promoting and advancing the fundamental rights of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience; and

WHEREAS, the history of Virginia is inextricably linked with the establishment of these basic human rights; the first document espousing these beliefs, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, was originally drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1777 and was the forerunner of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which ensured freedom of religion for all Americans; and

WHEREAS, the First Freedom Center was established in 1984 in anticipation of the bicentennial of the Virginia General Assembly's adoption of the statute in 1786; the landmark vote occurred in a building in Richmond where the legislature had temporary quarters; and

WHEREAS, today, the First Freedom Center educates people about the significance and meaning of the rights that allow nations and their citizens to enjoy freedom of religion and freedom of conscience without interference; and

WHEREAS, in the early part of the 21st century, the trustees of the First Freedom Center purchased the site where the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was enacted more than two centuries ago; their goal was to establish an educational center to promote understanding and respect for these rights; and

WHEREAS, during the last decade, the First Freedom Center has been developed in phases; it opened in 2006 in renovated buildings with offices, exhibits, a classroom, and a meeting space; and

WHEREAS, the second phase of the First Freedom Center was completed in 2015 and is now under the management of The Valentine Museum; the site features enhanced exhibits and programs that study the progress made toward establishing freedom of religion and freedom of conscience around the world; and

WHEREAS, since 1995, the First Freedom Center has also honored champions of religious liberty with its prestigious First Freedom Awards; past recipients of the awards have included British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Valentine First Freedom Center on more than three decades of promoting rights that Virginians have enjoyed for over two centuries—freedom of religion and freedom of conscience; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Valentine First Freedom Center as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for its commitment to promoting education about religious liberty.

INTRODUCED

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