

2020 SESSION

ENROLLED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 207

Commending Temple Beth El of Williamsburg.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 4, 2020
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 7, 2020

WHEREAS, Temple Beth El of Williamsburg, the only synagogue serving the city's Jewish community, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2019; and

WHEREAS, Williamsburg did not have a synagogue until 1959, when Dr. Paul and Ethel Sternberg, seeking to provide the children of the city's growing Jewish community a place to develop their religious education and practice, founded Temple Beth El; and

WHEREAS, initially holding services in the chapel of the Wren Building on the campus of The College of William and Mary, the congregation would establish a dedicated space for worship in the late 1960s by relocating the building that formerly housed a colonial gift shop to the temple's current location on Jamestown Road; and

WHEREAS, the congregation of Temple Beth El continued to grow into the 1980s and regularly held fundraisers like hat sales, bake sales, dances, and art shows to support the temple and its activities; and

WHEREAS, serving more than 40 families by the early 1990s, Temple Beth El determined it was time to appoint its first rabbi; in 1994, the temple's former religious coordinator, Sylvia Scholnick, assumed the position, becoming the first female rabbi of a Hampton Roads congregation and one of the first female rabbis in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, in the interest of inclusivity and to welcome all members of the Williamsburg Jewish community, Temple Beth El has maintained a nondenominational approach that is unaffiliated with any of the major movements in Judaism; and

WHEREAS, supporting the progressive havorah fellowship movement through some of its worship activities, Temple Beth El's services also include readings from the Conservative movement's prayer book, offering a spiritual practice that appeals to Jewish people of all creeds; and

WHEREAS, this approach, along with the increase in Williamsburg's Jewish population over the past two decades, has led more than 60 families to join Temple Beth El since Sylvia Scholnick became its rabbi 26 years ago; to accommodate this growing congregation, which now counts approximately 140 families as members, Temple Beth El expanded its synagogue in 2007; and

WHEREAS, for years, Temple Beth El has enjoyed a close relationship with The College of William and Mary; located across the street from the campus, the temple is easily accessible to students, while its current rabbi, David Katz, also works with the school's Jewish student organization, Balfour Hillel; and

WHEREAS, for 60 years, Temple Beth El has provided spiritual guidance, generous outreach, and opportunities for joyful worship to members of the Williamsburg Jewish community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Temple Beth El of Williamsburg on the occasion of its 60th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Rabbi David Katz, spiritual leader of Temple Beth El of Williamsburg, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the temple's history and its contributions to Williamsburg and the Commonwealth.

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