

## 2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

### HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 543

*Designating May, in 2023 and in each succeeding year, as Jewish American Heritage Month in Virginia.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 3, 2023

Agreed to by the Senate, February 14, 2023

WHEREAS, Jewish American history spans more than 350 years, dating back to the colonial era and early European settlements in Virginia, and is woven through every part of American history through to the present day; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is home to one of the oldest synagogues in the United States, Beth Ahabah in Richmond, founded in 1789 as Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome, and Virginia's Jewish community is among the fastest-growing Jewish communities in the nation; and

WHEREAS, Jews played an integral role in supporting American independence and the religious freedom guaranteed in the establishment of the new nation; in Virginia, Jewish citizens freely participated in all aspects of civil and political life under the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom; even so, in parts of the United States, Jews could not vote or hold office for several more decades; and

WHEREAS, in the mid-1800s, a wave of German Jewish immigrants, fleeing persecution and economic hardship in search of new opportunity, arrived in the United States; this wave of immigration led to the expansion of Jewish communities across the nation and the founding of B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Committee, and the National Council of Jewish Women; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Jewish immigration to the United States increased in response to rising anti-Semitism in Europe, and particularly in response to the pogroms in the Russian Empire; more than two million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States during this time; and

WHEREAS, restrictive immigration policies beginning in the 1920s stemmed the flow of new immigrants to the United States; many Jewish Americans opposed these policies, but they remained in place, leading to the United States' tragic refusal to accept refugees from Nazi Germany and leaving many of them unable to escape the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, Jewish Americans and Jewish immigrants to America have contributed to every aspect of American culture and history, including education, science, business, philanthropy, politics, civil rights, and the arts; among them are key figures in American and world history, including Jonas Salk, Albert Einstein, and Ruth Bader Ginsberg; and

WHEREAS, in light of continuing and reemerging anti-Semitism in America, expressed openly and violently, it is crucial that the history, heritage, and culture of Jewish Americans be fully known, understood, and valued; and

WHEREAS, Jewish American Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate the vibrancy and importance of Virginia's Jewish American citizens, whose accomplishments and contributions strengthen and enrich culture, governance, the economy, education, and all aspects of community life in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, during Jewish American Heritage Month, Virginians are encouraged to commemorate and celebrate the essential contributions, sacrifices, and accomplishments that Jewish Americans have made and continue to make in the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly designate May, in 2023 and in each succeeding year, as Jewish American Heritage Month in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of this month on the General Assembly's website.

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