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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 750

Offered February 17, 2023

Celebrating the life of Lillie Miller Finklea.

Patrons—Bennett-Parker; Senator: Ebbin

WHEREAS, Lillie Miller Finklea, an accomplished community activist and beloved member of the Alexandria community whose steadfast efforts preserved hundreds of African American gravesites in Alexandria and led to the establishment of the Alexandria Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial, died on December 27, 2022; and

WHEREAS, born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Alexandria, Lillie Finklea learned through the work of local historians that a cemetery existed on the south side of the Potomac River in Alexandria, where more than 1,800 African Americans had been interred around the time of the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, though the site had been compromised by the construction of the George Washington Memorial Parkway and a gas station, Lillie Finklea was determined to see the remainder of the site preserved and its legacy remembered; and

WHEREAS, Lillie Finklea took her cause to local African American churches and city officials in Alexandria and, on Memorial Day in 1997, she and fellow activist Louise Massoud held a wreath-laying ceremony at the site to honor the dead and raise awareness of the cemetery's existence; and

WHEREAS, following an official proclamation declaring the last week of May a week of remembrance for the Freedmen's Cemetery and the creation of the Friends of Freedmen's Cemetery organization, Lillie Finklea returned to the cemetery each Memorial Day, drawing increasing interest and support from local politicians, organizations, and media; and

WHEREAS, after securing a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, Lillie Finklea and Louise Massoud produced a website and pamphlet to educate the public about the history of the cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Lillie Finklea installed a sign at the site recognizing its importance, raised money for a Virginia historical highway marker, and supported the creation of an exhibition about the cemetery at the Alexandria Black History Museum; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, after years of advocacy on the part of Lillie Finklea, the City of Alexandria purchased the land encompassing the historical cemetery and rededicated it, leading to the discovery and preservation of nearly 500 graves; and

WHEREAS, shortly thereafter, the Alexandria Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial was established, and the cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, ensuring that the memory of this significant historical site will endure for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of the important role she played in preserving the history of African Americans in Alexandria, Lillie Finklea was named a Living Legend of Alexandria in 2009 and inducted into the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, preceded in death by her loving husband, Earl, Lillie Finklea will be fondly remembered and dearly missed by her sister, Bernice, and by numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Lillie Miller Finklea, a cherished member of the Alexandria community whose advocacy made a difference in the lives of many; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Lillie Miller Finklea as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for her memory.

INTRODUCED

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