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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 403

Offered February 20, 2023

Commending Venerria Lucas Thomas.

Patrons—Mason and Locke; Delegates: Mullin and Simonds

WHEREAS, for eight years, Venerria Lucas Thomas has promoted the health, safety, and wellbeing of adults, children, and families in Newport News as director of the Newport News Department of Human Services; and

WHEREAS, a native of Chicago, Venerria "Ven" Thomas holds degrees from Northwestern University and Willamette University and has developed a wide range of expertise in advocacy, race relations, and social justice by working for nonprofit organizations, private companies, and public entities; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas lived in the Pacific Northwest for 30 years, relocated to Florida, then settled in the Hampton Roads area; on September 16, 2014, she became the director of the Newport News Department of Human Services (NNDHS) bringing vision, fresh energy, enthusiasm, and style to the department's leadership; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas increased NNDHS visibility at local, city, and state levels through her inspirational leadership and commitment to engagement with other city and state agencies and committees, and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas developed initiatives to improve staff communication and involvement, including hosting quarterly director's forums, hosting open office hours, and establishing charter committees and affinity groups; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas led and participated in initiatives to provide services to members of the Newport News community, including the SAFE Program, the Choice Neighborhood Initiative Planning Grant, and assistance programs for residents of local mobile home parks; and

WHEREAS, in May 2018, Ven Thomas and her team successfully launched the 2019-2024 NNDHS Strategic Planning process in collaboration with Floricane, LLC; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas oversaw many facility and organizational enhancements during her tenure and successfully petitioned the city manager and leadership for approval to develop a permanent telework program for staff with a presentation by the NNDHS executive team; and

WHEREAS, outside of her work with the NNDHS, Ven Thomas served two terms as a member of the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board from 2016 to 2022, including a term as chair from July 2021 to June 2022; she also provided her leadership and expertise to the Virginia Association of Local Human Services Officials and the Virginia League of Social Service Executives; and

WHEREAS, Ven Thomas retired as director of the NNDHS on December 30, 2022, having served the Newport News community with dedication, integrity, and distinction and inspired her colleagues through her leadership, grace, and commitment to excellence; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Venerria Lucas Thomas for her many contributions to the community on the occasion of her retirement as director of the Newport News Department of Human Services; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Venerria Lucas Thomas as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for her personal and professional achievements.

INTRODUCED

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