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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 511

Offered January 20, 2025

Celebrating the life of Nikki Giovanni.

Patrons—Obenshain, Anthony, Arnold, Askew, Ballard, Bennett-Parker, Bulova, Callsen, Campbell, Carr, Clark, Cohen, Convirs-Fowler, Ennis, Feggans, Gardner, Gilbert, Glass, Green, Hayes, Helmer, Hernandez, Herring, Higgins, Hodges, Hope, Keys-Gamarra, Laufer, LeVere Bolling, Maldonado, Martinez, McClure, McNamara, McQuinn, Milde, Owen, Phillips, Price, Rasoul, Reid, Seibold, Sewell, Shin, Sickles, Simon, Simonds, Singh, Tata, Taylor, Thomas, Torian, Tran, Walker, Ward, Ware, Webert, Willett, Wilt and Zehr; Senators: Bagby, Boysko, Carroll Foy, Craig, Deeds, DeSteph, Diggs, Durant, Ebbin, Favola, French, Hackworth, Hashmi, Head, Jordan, Locke, Lucas, Marsden, McDougale, McPike, Mulchi, Obenshain, Peake, Pekarsky, Reeves, Roem, Rouse, Salim, Stanley, Stuart, Sturtevant, Suetterlein, Surovell, VanValkenburg and Williams Graves

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni, an iconic American poet who was a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, touched countless lives through her thought provoking literary works, and inspired students as a longtime faculty member of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, died on December 9, 2024; and

WHEREAS, Yolande Cornelia Giovanni, Jr., better known from a young age as Nikki Giovanni, was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, which always held a special place in her heart, and she spent much of her youth in Lincoln Heights, Ohio, near Cincinnati; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni excelled in academics and was accepted to Fisk University, a historically Black liberal arts college in Nashville, Tennessee, after her junior year of high school; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni was active on campus as the editor of Fisk University's literary magazine and supported the Civil Rights Movement by establishing a branch of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; she ultimately graduated with honors in 1967, earning a bachelor's degree in history; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, Nikki Giovanni published her first poetry collection, *Black Feeling Black Talk*, followed immediately by *Black Judgement*, the two of which have been combined in later reissues; featuring masterpieces like "Nikki-Rosa" and "Knoxville, Tennessee," the collections quickly became a touchstone of Black American poetry, and readers were enthralled by her fearless wit and commanding voice; and

WHEREAS, a prolific author, Nikki Giovanni crafted more than 20 volumes of poetry over the course of her career, including the most recent collection in 2020, *Make Me Rain: Poems & Prose*; her works covered a wide range of topics from everyday occurrences to racism, politics, mortality, and even space travel; and

WHEREAS, after the birth of her son in 1969, Nikki Giovanni was inspired to write for younger audiences and published her first children's book in 1971; she subsequently authored more than a dozen children's books and poetry collections, as well as a biography of Rosa Parks; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, Nikki Giovanni set her poetry to music in her first album, "Truth is on Its Way," recorded with the New York Community Choir; she recorded several other albums from the 1970s through the 2020s; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her literary career, Nikki Giovanni taught at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for 35 years and held a University Distinguished Professorship in the English Department; and

WHEREAS, among many accolades, Nikki Giovanni received lifetime achievement awards from the Art Sanctuary and the Library of Virginia; she was an eight-time NAACP Image Award winner, was listed on Oprah Winfrey's "25 Living Legends," and was profiled in the documentary film *Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project*; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni was a passionate advocate for social justice and systemic change, whose works empowered readers to make a difference in their communities, and as a modern luminary in the arts, she inspired generations of students, scholars, poets, authors, artists, musicians, and activists; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by her longtime partner, Ginney; her son, Thomas, and his family; and 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 Nikki Giovanni, a pre-eminent poet and author, devoted activist, and inspirational educator; 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 Nikki Giovanni as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for her memory.

INTRODUCED

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