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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 312

Offered January 27, 2025

*Commending the Hickory Hill School.*

Patrons—Hashmi and Bagby

WHEREAS, the historic Hickory Hill School, located in what is now part of Southside Richmond, previously served generations of young people as Chesterfield County's only training school for African American students during the segregation era; and

WHEREAS, the Hickory Hill School was established around 1869 and was a driving force in education and workforce training for African American students in Chesterfield County for the 100 years thereafter; and

WHEREAS, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad donated 1.82 acres to support the Hickory Hill School's educational endeavors in 1910, and local residents working with the Hickory Hill School Improvement League continued to donate land as the years went on; and

WHEREAS, in the 1920s, the Hickory Hill School benefited from the Rural School Building Program of Tuskegee University, in partnership with the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and became the first non-city high school for African American students in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, over the course of its history, the Hickory Hill School operated as a high school, an elementary school, and as the Chesterfield County Training School, training teachers and students in the industrial arts, home economics, agriculture, and academic pursuits; and

WHEREAS, after the original school building was destroyed by fire in 1938, the Hickory Hill School was reconstructed and became the first brick school building in Chesterfield County with a design by state architect Raymond V. Long; and

WHEREAS, James Preston Spencer, a local community leader, and his wife, Evie Carpenter Spencer, who was a member of the faculty at Virginia State University, donated additional land to expand Hickory Hill School in 1938; and

WHEREAS, that same year, James Spencer began serving as the principal of the Hickory Hill School and reaffirmed the school's commitment to excellence, both in academics and community stewardship; and also by serving as president of the Virginia Teachers Association, the Chesterfield County Teachers Association, and the Third District for the Virginia Association for Education; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his contributions to education, James Spencer was a founder of the Virginia Voters League that established local chapters throughout the Commonwealth and challenged the poll tax; he also was a founder of the Chesterfield County Branch of the NAACP, which was recognized in the mid-1930s for having the largest membership of any rural branch in the United States; and

WHEREAS, James Spencer worked with NAACP attorney Oliver Hill to represent three local teachers, Arthur M. Freeman, Rubye M. DeWitt, and Dorothy T. Reese, in a U.S. Court of Appeals case that successfully countered teacher salary discrimination in 1948; and

WHEREAS, the Hickory Hill School was a cultural institution that served a critical educational need and built diverse partnerships that fostered civic engagement and sustained community life from the end of the Civil War through the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, though the Hickory Hill School ultimately closed, former students, teachers, administrators, alumni, and community partners, including the Hickory Hill Preservation Committee, Southside Joint Civic Association, and the Renewal of Life Land Trust preserved and safeguarded the site, which is now listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, the Hickory Hill School currently operates as the Hickory Hill Community Center and continues to shape civic and educational values, promotes important social priorities, and builds connections between past, present, and future generations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Hickory Hill School for its service to generations of African American students in the Richmond region; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Hickory Hill Community Center as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the enduring legacy of the historic Hickory Hill School.