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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 319

Offered January 28, 2025

Commending the King William County Courthouse.

Patrons—Stuart and McDougle; Delegate: Hodges

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse, the oldest courthouse building in continuous use in the United States, has served the local community and the Commonwealth for 300 years; and

WHEREAS, in 1700, residents of King and Queen County living between the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers expressed that it was difficult to prosecute lawsuits or attend public meetings due to the location of the county seat; and

WHEREAS, on April 11, 1702, by an act of the General Assembly, the area known as Pamunkey Neck in King and Queen County became King William County, the 24th county in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Henry Fox of Huntington Plantation and Richard Littlepage of Cumberland conveyed a two-acre site in the central part of King William County, which contained a wooden structure that served as a courthouse; and

WHEREAS, the 13 original justices presiding over this court in 1702 were Henry Fox, John Waller, John West, Henry Madison, William Claiborn, Richard Gissedge, Martin Palmer, Daniel Miles, Roger Mallory, Thomas Carr, William Noy, George Dabrice (Dabney), and Thomas Terry; and

WHEREAS, in March 1722, after 20 years of use, the wooden courthouse building was “irreparable” and was in “ruinous” condition, and the question arose of where and when to build a new courthouse; and

WHEREAS, the new King William County Courthouse was constructed in 1725; the T-shaped, hipped roof building was “constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond” with glazed headers and “with an arcade imitating the first capital of Williamsburg”; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse is still surrounded by a fully intact low wall, originally built to keep livestock out of the court green; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse was the heart of local self-government and much of the social, economic, and communal life of King William County; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse met once a month for justices to handle a wide variety of legal matters; the court also met four times a year for non-capital criminal cases and small claims and convened a grand jury once per year; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse was used during the Colonial period to elect members of the House of Burgesses, and it served as the designated polling place when the governor deemed other elections were necessary; and

WHEREAS, during the early stages of the American Revolution, local patriots forming the county committee convened in the King William County Courthouse, where Carter Braxton, committee chair and future signer of the Declaration of Independence, received the news of the Battles of Lexington and Concord; and

WHEREAS, in addition to being in continuous use for the entirety of its 300-year history, the King William County Courthouse is considered the best preserved of the Commonwealth's remaining Colonial court buildings; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Courthouse was listed in the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1959, the Virginia Landmarks Register on November 5, 1968, and the National Register of Historic Places on October 1, 1969; and

WHEREAS, the original King William County Courthouse was in daily use until 2004, when a new complex was constructed to better serve local residents; however, some hearings are still occasionally held in the original building; and

WHEREAS, the King William County Historical Museum and the King William Virginia 250 Planning Committee will hold a celebration on April 12, 2025, commemorating the 300th anniversary of the historic King William County Courthouse; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the historic King William County Courthouse on the occasion of its 300th anniversary of service to the community; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to representatives of King William County as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the unique role the King William County Courthouse continues to play in county government and local life.