

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 224

Celebrating the life of Nikki Giovanni.

Agreed to by the Senate, January 30, 2025

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; the collections, featuring masterpieces like "Nikki-Rosa" and "Knoxville, Tennessee," 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, That the Senate of Virginia hereby note with great sadness the loss of Nikki Giovanni, a preeminent poet and author, devoted activist, and inspirational educator; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Nikki Giovanni as an expression of the Senate of Virginia's respect for her memory.

ENROLLED

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