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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 682

Offered February 14, 2025

Commemorating the life and legacy of William Flora.

Patrons—Leftwich, Hayes, Anthony, Clark and Ennis; Senators: Craig, Jordan and Lucas

WHEREAS, William Flora, a native of Portsmouth and the hero of the Battle of Great Bridge during the American Revolutionary War, played a pivotal role in the founding of the nation; and

WHEREAS, William “Billy” Flora, even under the most catastrophic circumstances, sustained hope for an ideal “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”; and

WHEREAS, William Flora was born to free Black parents in Portsmouth and joined the revolutionary cause at a young age by enlisting with Colonel William Woodford's 2nd Virginia Regiment in 1775; and

WHEREAS, during the Battle of Great Bridge near Norfolk on December 9, 1775, William Flora was the last sentry standing guard on Great Bridge, where he single-handedly engaged an entire British platoon and is credited with removing planks from the Great Bridge, which slowed the British advance and enabled his fellow militiamen to mount their defense; and

WHEREAS, following the Battle of Great Bridge, which was the first victory for the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War, William Flora's courage and valor were lauded by his comrades and celebrated in a local newspaper of the time; and

WHEREAS, William Flora later enlisted as a private in Captain William Grimes' 15th Virginia Continental Regiment and served with this unit for three years until he was honorably discharged; and

WHEREAS, William Flora is believed to have also served with the 5th, 11th, and 16th Virginia Regiments during the American Revolutionary War and to have participated in the Battle of Yorktown, which brought about the end of the war; and

WHEREAS, in later years, William Flora owned a successful livery stable in Portsmouth and became one of the first free Black men in the Commonwealth to buy town property, an estate that was passed on through the years to his son and grandson; and

WHEREAS, in honor of his service during the American Revolutionary War, William Flora was presented a 100-acre bounty land warrant 31 years after the Battle of Great Bridge; and

WHEREAS, William Flora valiantly served the country once again following the British Navy's attack on the USS *Chesapeake* in 1807, when he enlisted and served as a marine on a gun boat under the command of Commodore Stephen Decatur; and

WHEREAS, William Flora's life and involvement in the American Revolutionary War have been memorialized with a historical marker at the Great Bridge Battlefield site, allowing future generations to better appreciate his contributions to America's fight for independence; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commemorate the life and legacy of William Flora on the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation as an expression of the General Assembly's deep respect and admiration for his heroism and service in the founding days of the Commonwealth and the nation.

INTRODUCED

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