

2024 SPECIAL SESSION I

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 868

Celebrating the life of the Honorable Willard H. Douglas, Jr.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, April 2, 2025

WHEREAS, the Honorable Willard H. Douglas, Jr., an honorable veteran and esteemed attorney and judge whose pioneering achievements helped to transform the legal profession for the benefit of others, died on February 16, 2025; and

WHEREAS, a native of Amherst County who was affectionately known by family and friends as “Doug,” Willard Douglas was drafted into the United States Marine Corps and served his country with honor and distinction during the Korean War, achieving the rank of sergeant and garnering various service awards; and

WHEREAS, following his military service, Willard Douglas earned a bachelor's degree in 1957 from Virginia Union University and a juris doctor degree in 1960 from Howard University; and

WHEREAS, Willard Douglas embarked upon an illustrious legal career that included many trailblazing accomplishments, such as being an attorney for the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the first African American to serve as assistant Commonwealth's attorney for the City of Richmond, and the first African American to serve as a public defender in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, on January 30, 1974, the General Assembly elected Willard Douglas to serve as a judge presiding in the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, making him the first officially elected, full-time African American judge to serve in the Commonwealth; during his time on the bench, his integrity and commitment to justice and fairness earned him the admiration and respect of many; and

WHEREAS, Willard Douglas gave generously of his time over the years as a member of a number of charitable, community, and professional organizations, including Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., the American Bar Association, and the Old Dominion Bar Association; and

WHEREAS, with a deep passion for education and mentorship, Willard Douglas served on the Board of Trustees at Ferrum College for 10 years and the Board of Trustees at Virginia Wesleyan University for 20 years; and

WHEREAS, guided throughout his life by his faith, Willard Douglas devoted himself to serving the United Methodist Church at both the local and national levels, including at multiple general and jurisdictional conferences, on the General Commission on Religion and Race, and in various other leadership capacities; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of his efforts as a religious and civic leader in the community, Willard Douglas was presented many awards over his lifetime, including the Lifetime Ecumenist Award from the Virginia Council of Churches in 2016; and

WHEREAS, preceded in death by his wife of 62 years, Jane, Willard Douglas will be fondly remembered and dearly missed by his children, Willard III and Wendelin, and their families and by numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Delegates hereby note with great sadness the loss of the Honorable Willard H. Douglas, Jr., a renowned attorney and judge whose faith and legacy of excellence, leadership, and service inspired all who knew him; 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 the Honorable Willard H. Douglas, Jr., as an expression of the House of Delegates' respect for his memory.

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