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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 49

Offered January 20, 2026

Commending the Robert Russa Moton Museum.

Patrons—Williams Graves, Cifers, Mulchi and Suetterlein

WHEREAS, in 2026, the Robert Russa Moton Museum in Farmville, which has preserved and interpreted the Commonwealth's unique role in the civil rights movement for 25 years, will honor the 75th anniversary of the Robert Russa Moton High School student strike, a pivotal event in the fight against school segregation; and

WHEREAS, the Robert Russa Moton Museum is located in the former Robert Russa Moton High School building, a segregated public school established in 1939 that served Black students from the Farmville area; and

WHEREAS, by the early 1950s, Robert Russa Moton High School was unable to provide an adequate learning environment due to severe overcrowding, unsafe conditions, outdated textbooks, and facilities that were not equal to those offered at schools for white students in the area; and

WHEREAS, on April 23, 1951, Barbara Johns, a 16-year-old junior at Robert Russa Moton High School, worked with several classmates to plan a student strike protesting these unacceptable conditions and ultimately demanding school integration; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Johns and her fellow students sought legal counsel from the NAACP, and the ensuing case of *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, filed by attorneys Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson, reached the Supreme Court of the United States along with four other similar cases, and formed the basis of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling; and

WHEREAS, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* was the only school integration case initiated by a student strike, and Robert Russa Moton High School is now considered the birthplace of similar student-led actions for civil rights; and

WHEREAS, in 1959, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors voted to defund and close schools rather than comply with integration orders; subsequent student protests led to the establishment of the Prince Edward Free Schools, which local students attended until 1964, when the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the case of *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* that public schools must reopen; and

WHEREAS, despite its unique role in the civil rights movement, Robert Russa Moton High School was scheduled for demolition until the Martha E. Forrester Council of Women in Farmville raised funds to purchase the historic building in 1996; the building was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1998, then opened to the public as a museum in 2001; and

WHEREAS, the Robert Russa Moton Museum features the original auditorium where Barbara Johns and her fellow students launched the strike, as well as other documents and artifacts; and

WHEREAS, the Robert Russa Moton Museum also maintains "The Moton School Story: Children of Courage" permanent exhibit, which tells the stories of both the walk-out generation of students who organized the strike in 1951 and the lock-out generation of students who went without schooling for five years, both in the brave pursuit of justice and equality; and

WHEREAS, the Robert Russa Moton Museum provides opportunities for students across the nation to learn more about the history of the civil rights movement, and the museum serves as part of the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail; and

WHEREAS, in 2015, the Robert Russa Moton Museum partnered with Longwood University to further advance the missions of both institutions and promote dialogue on equality in education; and

WHEREAS, the Robert Russa Moton Museum has played an incomparable role in preserving the history of the civil rights movement in Prince Edward County and the leading role its citizens played in the victory over massive resistance and the successful establishment of racially integrated schools in the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Robert Russa Moton Museum on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its establishment and the 75th anniversary of the Robert Russa Moton High School student strike; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Robert Russa Moton Museum as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the historical significance of the Robert Russa Moton High School student strike and for the museum's achievements in historical preservation, education, and community stewardship.

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