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SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 27

Offered January 28, 2026

*Celebrating the life of the Reverend Dr. Joe Billy Fleming.*

Patrons—Lucas and Williams Graves

WHEREAS, the Reverend Dr. Joe Billy Fleming of Portsmouth, a spiritual leader who guided church communities throughout the Commonwealth and touched countless lives through his commitment to servant leadership, died on April 15, 2025; and

WHEREAS, a native of Holdenville, Oklahoma, Joe Billy Fleming graduated from the former Bishop College in Texas, where he joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1960s, he participated in efforts to desegregate public facilities in Marshall, Texas, and was arrested during a sit-in; his experiences with the civil rights movement shaped his lifelong commitment to community organizing and service to others; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming continued his education at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University in Richmond, the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and the Boston University School of Theology; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming began his journey as minister at Antioch Baptist Church in Mathews County, where he served as pastor from 1964 to 1969; under his leadership, the church paid off its mortgage, completed significant renovations to better serve the congregation, and hired a minister of Christian education; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming next served as pastor of Quioccasin Baptist Church in Richmond from 1969 to 1981; he simultaneously offered his leadership to the Richmond Community Action Program, the Baptist Ministers Conference of Richmond & Vicinity, Meals on Wheels, the American Red Cross, the Henrico County Branch of the NAACP, and other important social programs; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming was best known for his 35-year tenure as the eighth pastor of Third Baptist Church in Portsmouth from 1981 to 2016; and

WHEREAS, during that time, Joe Billy Fleming's extensive community service in the Portsmouth area included roles as the 44th president of what is now the Metro Ministers Conference of Virginia, Inc., president of the Portsmouth Branch of the NAACP, chair of the Board of Directors for The Salvation Army of Portsmouth, and a board member of the Southeastern Red Cross, the Urban League of Hampton Roads, and the Center for Community Development, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming was also a founding member and past president of the Martin Luther King Leadership Steering Committee of Portsmouth, commissioner of the Virginia Port Authority, chair of the Electoral Board for the City of Portsmouth for 13 years, and chair of the Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority; and

WHEREAS, after his well-earned retirement, Joe Billy Fleming was named as the first pastor emeritus in the history of Third Baptist Church, and he proudly witnessed his son, Joseph, succeed him as the congregation's ninth pastor; and

WHEREAS, among many other awards and accolades, Joe Billy Fleming received a 2011 Humanitarian Award from the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities and the Pastor of the Year award from the Tidewater Metro Baptist Ministers' Conference; and

WHEREAS, Joe Billy Fleming will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife of 60 years, Johnnie; his children, Kelton, Zina, and Joseph, and their families; and numerous other family members, friends, and congregants; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of Virginia hereby note with great sadness the loss of the Reverend Dr. Joe Billy Fleming, a highly admired faith leader and a pillar of the community in Portsmouth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of the Reverend Dr. Joe Billy Fleming as an expression of the Senate of Virginia's respect for his memory.