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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 129

Offered February 24, 2026

Commending the Virginia Black Restaurant Experience.

Patrons—Bagby, Aird and Williams Graves; Delegates: Anthony, Callsen, Carroll, Clark, Cole, J.G., Cole, N.T., Cousins, Henson, LeVere Bolling, Maldonado, McQuinn, Pope Adams, Price and Rasoul

WHEREAS, the Virginia Black Restaurant Experience was launched in 2016 by community leaders Shemicia Bowen, Amy Wentz, and Kelli Lemon, three African American civic, community, and entrepreneurial champions whose mission was to create an annual celebration that uplifted Black-owned restaurants, chefs, and food service professionals across the Greater Richmond area; and

WHEREAS, the inaugural Virginia Black Restaurant Experience (VBRE) celebration consisted of only 19 participating restaurants; over the past 10 years, the event has grown exponentially to include more than 60 restaurants, food trucks, caterers, bakers, and mobile culinary entrepreneurs, reflecting the vibrancy, diversity, and innovation of Black-owned food service businesses in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, VBRE has generated millions of dollars in economic activity for the Richmond region, reinvesting directly into small business owners, local suppliers, hospitality workers, and tourism-related industries while serving as both a major economic driver during early spring and the ignition to the annual festival season; and

WHEREAS, through collective, coordinated marketing efforts, VBRE has amplified the Richmond region as a premier culinary destination, bringing regional and national attention to Black-owned restaurants and positioning the Commonwealth as a leader in tourism, culture, and food innovation; and

WHEREAS, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many small restaurants struggled to survive, VBRE served as a stabilizing force by connecting owners to resources, offering direct support, supplying emergency visibility, and advocating for noncompetitive funding and grants to help keep doors open and protect jobs; and

WHEREAS, VBRE has partnered with civic, nonprofit, tourism, and educational institutions to address disparities in access to capital, workforce development, and business infrastructure, thereby strengthening pathways to sustainability for Black hospitality entrepreneurs; and

WHEREAS, the VBRE has become one of the Commonwealth's most influential cultural and economic events, attracting tens of thousands of visitors, inspiring similar models in other municipalities, and demonstrating how diverse culinary ecosystems contribute to the social and economic vitality of the region; and

WHEREAS, 2026 marks the 10th anniversary of the VBRE, representing a decade of cultural celebration, economic empowerment, and community building in the Cities of Richmond, Petersburg, Hampton, and Harrisonburg, as well as Henrico County and Chesterfield County; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Virginia Black Restaurant Experience on the occasion of its 10th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to representatives of the Virginia Black Restaurant Experience as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the extraordinary economic and cultural impact this initiative has had on the Richmond region and the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCED

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