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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 242

Offered March 9, 2026

Commending Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Patrons—Bagby; Delegates: Carr, Cousins and McQuinn

WHEREAS, the congregation at Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest church in the Jackson Ward neighborhood of Richmond and the second oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the Commonwealth, commemorated its 175th anniversary in 2025; and

WHEREAS, the origins of Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church may be traced to a group of formerly enslaved individuals who were members of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church in Richmond and who formed their own congregation in 1850 in resistance to the segregation and discrimination they experienced at their church; and

WHEREAS, two years after the congregation formed, Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church acquired a parcel of land on Third Street in Richmond to be used by the congregation; then, in 1856, the main structure of what is today Third Street Bethel AME Church was constructed with the support of skilled Black artisans and the trustees of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, known initially as Third Street Methodist Church, the church adopted the discipline of the AME Church and held the first organizing session of the Virginia Annual Conference of the AME Church on May 10, 1867; thereafter, the church was known as the Third Street Bethel AME Church and as the mother church of the AME denomination in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, James D.S. Hall was appointed to serve as pastor of Third Street Bethel AME Church at the Virginia AME Annual Conference in 1867, becoming the first African American to lead the congregation since its founding; the congregation has since been led by a distinguished line of faith leaders, including its 46th and current pastor, the Reverend Reuben J. Boyd, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, over the years, many organizations and movements found their impetus within the walls of Third Street Bethel AME Church, and the church was notably where renowned community leader Maggie L. Walker gave her famous "Unity Speech" in 1901, when she described her vision of a Black-owned bank, newspaper, and emporium; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of its extraordinary cultural, historical, and architectural significance, the Third Street Bethel AME Church building was placed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 1975; and

WHEREAS, the members of Third Street Bethel AME Church have dedicated themselves to helping their community through various outreach programs and ministries over the years, addressing the needs of the underserved while inspiring individuals to grow in their faith; and

WHEREAS, as a beacon of strength, resilience, and hope in Richmond for the past 175 years, Third Street Bethel AME Church has made a positive and lasting impact on countless lives; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church for its legacy of service on the occasion of its 175th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Reverend Reuben J. Boyd, Jr., pastor of Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the church's history and its contributions to the Commonwealth.