

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 157

*Commending Nelson Smith.*

Agreed to by the Senate, March 5, 2026  
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 9, 2026

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith, a respected public servant and a leader in behavioral health and developmental services, concluded his service to the Commonwealth after a distinguished tenure dedicated to improving care for individuals, families, and communities; and

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith most recently served as commissioner of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, having been appointed to that role by the governor in 2022, and provided continuity, strategic leadership, and vision during a period of significant transformation in Virginia's behavioral health system; and

WHEREAS, under Nelson Smith's leadership, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, in partnership with the Behavioral Health Commission, community services boards, providers, advocates, and families, played a critical role in advancing access to high-quality behavioral health, developmental, and substance use disorder services across the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, throughout his tenure, Nelson Smith worked closely with members of the General Assembly, particularly through sustained engagement with the Behavioral Health Commission, to provide transparent information, data-driven analysis, and thoughtful policy guidance in support of legislative oversight, system accountability, and meaningful reform; and

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith strengthened the crisis response system in the Commonwealth by helping to establish the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and expanding mobile crisis services and crisis centers, ensuring that Virginians experiencing behavioral health crises receive help when and where it is needed and avoid hospitalizations whenever possible; and

WHEREAS, during Nelson Smith's tenure, the Commonwealth concluded the federal settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice and transitioned to a permanent injunction, reflecting sustained progress and continued accountability in ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities live in the most integrated settings appropriate to their needs and informed choices; and

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith led efforts to unify the Commonwealth's hospitals and centers into a more coordinated and accountable system of care, emphasizing shared standards, workforce stability, patient safety, and consistent leadership across facilities while navigating unprecedented workforce and operational challenges; and

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith championed the use of data and performance measurement to accelerate accountability and inform decision-making, advancing modernization of data systems, public dashboards, and analytic tools that improved transparency for policymakers, providers, and the public; and

WHEREAS, guided by a steadfast commitment to caring for patients and the staff who serve them, Nelson Smith emphasized respect, dignity, and compassion as foundational values, recognizing that a strong and supported workforce is essential to delivering effective care; and

WHEREAS, Nelson Smith grounded his leadership in a belief in hope, affirming that recovery, stability, and a life of possibility are achievable for individuals, families, and communities when services are designed with intention, accountability, and humanity; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth owes Nelson Smith a deep debt of gratitude for his integrity, perseverance, and unwavering dedication to public service, and for his lasting contributions to strengthening Virginia's behavioral health system during a period of historic change; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Nelson Smith for his exemplary leadership and distinguished service to the Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Nelson Smith as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for his contributions to the well-being of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

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