

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 52

*Celebrating the life of William J. Martin.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 15, 2026  
Agreed to by the Senate, January 22, 2026

WHEREAS, William J. Martin, a passionate historian who helped countless individuals engage with the Commonwealth's past through his visionary leadership as the longtime director at the Valentine, an esteemed private museum in Richmond, died on December 28, 2025; and

WHEREAS, William "Bill" J. Martin grew up in the Brandy Station community of Culpeper County and began to cultivate a love of history and storytelling from a young age; he spent much of his youth searching for Civil War artifacts in the area and made frequent trips to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., with his family; and

WHEREAS, after receiving a bachelor's degree in urban studies and a master's degree in public administration from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Bill Martin moved to Georgia to oversee the Okefenokee Heritage Center, then worked for a museum in Jacksonville, Florida; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, Bill Martin returned to the Commonwealth, where he led efforts to revitalize Petersburg through Petersburg Main Street and Petersburg Downtown, Inc., and later became the city's director of tourism; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin subsequently joined the Valentine as director of marketing and public affairs in 1994; after being named director in 1995, he worked with the board to stabilize the museum's finances and operations following the closure of Valentine Riverside at Tredegar Iron Works, an unsuccessful expansion; and

WHEREAS, under Bill Martin's leadership, the Valentine launched major renovations and redeveloped programming to elevate untold stories and foster public dialogue; his strategies helped the museum fulfill its mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the city's history, while also growing into a dynamic community resource; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin worked with other museums and cultural institutions in Richmond to incorporate a variety of viewpoints and backgrounds in the Valentine's programs; after the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, he launched an exhibition about the history of Richmond's Confederate monuments and asked architects and planners to reimagine a more inclusive Monument Avenue; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin was a trusted mentor to peers in his field, and he inspired colleagues, employees, and museum visitors through his empathy, sense of service, collaborative nature, intelligence, and sense of humor; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin also relished opportunities to give walking tours throughout the city, delighting visitors with tales of the people, places, and events that shaped Church Hill, Oregon Hill, Jackson Ward, Court End, and other Richmond neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, among many awards and accolades, Bill Martin was inducted into the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* Person of the Year Hall of Fame in 2018 and was recognized by *Style Weekly* as the Richmonder of the Year in 2024; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin upheld the Valentine's 125-year legacy of excellence and left the institution well-prepared to meet the challenges of the future and continue to enhance local life in Richmond; and

WHEREAS, Bill Martin will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by numerous family members, friends, colleagues, and patrons of the Valentine; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of William J. Martin, a pillar of the Richmond community who reshaped the way residents and visitors engage with local history; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of William J. Martin as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

ENROLLED

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