

2026 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 195

Commending the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg.

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

WHEREAS, for 250 years, the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg, one of the oldest African American congregations in the country, has been a beacon of faith for the community; and

WHEREAS, the origins of the First Baptist Church date to 1776, when a group of free and enslaved Black people began meeting secretly for prayer and song in a brush arbor on the Green Spring Plantation in James City County; and

WHEREAS, the group was first led by the Black itinerant preacher, the Reverend Moses, and was later organized as Baptists in 1781 under the guidance of the Reverend Gowan Pamphlet, an enslaved man from Williamsburg; and

WHEREAS, after holding services in the Raccoon Chase area outside of Williamsburg for some time, a member of the Cole family in Williamsburg, inspired by the faith and conviction of the congregation, offered the group the use of their carriage house on Nassau Street; and

WHEREAS, in 1856, the group dedicated a new, brick church building near the Nassau Street carriage house, which would serve as the church's home for the next century until it moved into its current place of worship on Scotland Street in 1956; and

WHEREAS, known prior to the Civil War as the African Baptist Church, the church was officially renamed the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg in 1863; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, a partnership between the First Baptist Church and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to restore the church's 1886 Freedom Bell led to the creation of the Let Freedom Ring Foundation, an organization dedicated to protecting and preserving the historic building, landscape, and artifacts of the First Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, in collaboration with Colonial Williamsburg archaeologists, the Let Freedom Ring Foundation recently discovered 62 graves of descendants of the First Baptist Church, which led to the creation of a memorial at the grave site honoring their legacy; and

WHEREAS, as a spiritual home to Americans dating back to the founding of the nation, the First Baptist Church has empowered and uplifted countless lives while leaving an indelible imprint on Williamsburg, the Commonwealth, and the nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg hereby be commended on the occasion of its 250th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for church's history and its contributions to the Commonwealth.

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