

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 743

Commending Eugene Williams.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 6, 2015
Agreed to by the Senate, February 12, 2015

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams of Charlottesville, a longtime community leader and advocate for civil rights, was honored on November 5, 2014, as a Paul Harris Fellow by the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club for his leadership and vision and especially for his work to remove racial barriers and provide affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams is a native of Charlottesville, which was markedly segregated when he was a young boy; he attended blacks-only public schools, and his home, which fronted a dirt road, had no indoor plumbing; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from the Jefferson High School in Charlottesville, Eugene Williams attended Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; he then served a tour of duty in the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, in 1953, Eugene Williams returned home and began working in the insurance business, becoming Regional Vice President of Universal Life Insurance Company; the following year he was named president of the Charlottesville Branch of the NAACP and was in the forefront of the civil rights movement in Charlottesville for many years; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams and his wife, Lorraine Payne Williams, formed a committee of parents to integrate the Charlottesville Public Schools; the group won a lawsuit that ordered two public schools to desegregate, but the school system closed the two schools rather than comply with the court order; and

WHEREAS, when the Charlottesville Public Schools reopened in 1962, the Williams' two daughters, Karol and Scheryl, ages 10 and 8 respectively, were enrolled at and escorted by police to formerly all-white schools; years later their daughter Scheryl was named Homecoming Queen at Lane High School, which was less than 10 percent African American; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams also was concerned about the loss of the working-class neighborhood of Vinegar Hill; during Charlottesville's urban renewal efforts, many African American homes and businesses were demolished, creating a demand for affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams, together with his wife, Lorraine, brother, Albert, and sister-in-law, Emma, bought and rehabilitated 62 housing units in Charlottesville; they formed Dogwood Housing to rehabilitate and rent the apartments to low-income and underserved families, and they owned the successful property management company until they sold it in 2007; and

WHEREAS, Eugene Williams was nominated in 1986 to join the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club; his life's mission—to erase segregation and help the less fortunate in Charlottesville—epitomizes Rotary's motto of "Service Above Self"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Eugene Williams of Charlottesville, a community leader and civil rights advocate, who was named a Paul Harris Fellow by the Blue Ridge Mountains Rotary Club for his leadership and vision in removing racial barriers and providing affordable housing; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Eugene Williams as an expression of the General Assembly's great respect and admiration for his unwavering determination to right a wrong and provide equal opportunity for all people.

ENROLLED

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