



A RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE LATE GEORGE W. HARRIS, JR.

WHEREAS, the Honorable George Wendall Harris, Jr. died on January 23rd, 2015 at his home in Roanoke County, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris was 79 years old at the time of his death; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris attended the public schools of Lynchburg and was one of three African-Americans to attend the University of Virginia's School of Engineering from 1955-1957, and after transferring to the University of Toledo and then to Virginia Union University, graduated in 1963 with a degree in Business Administration and then graduated from North Carolina Central University School of Law and received his law degree in 1967; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris was active in the civil rights movement in Virginia and was a member of the famous "Richmond 34", a group of Virginia Union University students who in 1960 staged a sit-in at Thalhimer's Department Store restaurant in Downtown Richmond, resulting in his arrest for trespassing, a charge later overturned by the United States Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris passed the bar and moved to Roanoke in 1967, where he established a very successful private practice while continuing to serve his community and state as a highly regarded member of many advisory boards, including among others the Roanoke City School Board, the Southwest Virginia Community Development Fund, the James Madison University Board of Visitors, and the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of his special talents and contributions to the betterment of his community, the General Assembly of Virginia elected Judge Harris to the General District Court bench in 1985, in the 23rd Judicial District, where he served as the first African-American judge in Southwest Virginia, sitting as a judge for the City of Roanoke, the City of Salem, the County of Roanoke and the Town of Vinton; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris served 20 years as a General District Court Judge and retired on July 1, 2005 and continued to serve as a substitute judge for many years; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris was a member of many civic and fraternal organizations and received various awards of recognition including the Salem Kiwanis Humanitarian of the Year, a Special Commendation from the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Roanoke Valley LSA Boss of the Year, the Court Street Baptist Church Man of the Year, the Action Against Poverty Leadership Award, the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (Gamma Alpha Chapter) Citizen of the Year, the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Beta Phi Boule' Community Service Award, and the Roanoke County Lions Humanitarian Award; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris enjoyed engaging people in conversation and informally held court in the breezeway of the Roanoke County Courthouse on matters far exceeding his statutory jurisdiction, and also did so while sitting outside the back door of O'Brien's Meats, and spent innumerable hours at Brambleton Imports, stating his strongly held opinions on any and all subjects, and while he was known by all not to mince words and spoke in colorful terms, and was crystal clear and vocal as to where he stood on every issue, especially on certain coaching decisions at the various UVA games he attended while rooting for his beloved Cavaliers, he was nonetheless recognized by all to have a heart-of-gold, and was loved by his family, friends and community; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris will be remembered by those who knew him well for little known acts of kindness, such as his longstanding practice of coming to the courthouse on the last business day before Christmas Eve to enter early release orders for

prisoners a few days shy of finishing their sentences so they could be home with their families on Christmas morning; and

WHEREAS, Judge Harris was married to the late Helen Camm Harris for 57 Years, and is survived by his son George W. Harris, III and his daughter-in-law Earnestine, his grandson Justin W. Harris, and his granddaughter Jordan A. Harris as well as his extended family,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Roanoke Bar Association does hereby express its deepest sympathy to the family of Judge George W. Harris, Jr. and does hereby recognize his distinguished career and service to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the courts of the 23rd Judicial District of Virginia; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be entered in the permanent records of the Roanoke Bar Association and that a copy be sent to the family of Judge Harris as an expression of sympathy.

GIVEN under the hands of the president and secretary of the Roanoke Bar Association and the seal of the Association this 14th day of June, 2016.

Joseph W. H. Mott
President, Roanoke Bar Association

TESTE:

Kevin W. Holt
Secretary, Roanoke Bar Association