**A** **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

TO CELEBRATE AND HONOR THE LIFE OF VIRGINIA RILEY “DEN” PRIESTER, SOUTH CAROLINA’S FIRST BLACK FEMALE CORONER, FOR HER SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR STATE AND TO HER COMMUNITY.

Whereas, Den Riley was the daughter of the late Marion F. Riley, Sr., and the late Mary Garvin‑Riley and was born on May 14, 1940, in Allendale County, their second eldest child; and

Whereas, because she excelled as a student, she was accelerated from the sixth to the eighth grade, and she earned a diploma from Fairfax Training School in 1957. In 1958, Virginia graduated from Eckels College of Mortuary Science in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, earning the Dean’s Award for her outstanding academic work; and

Whereas, at the young age of eighteen, she began her professional career with her father at Riley’s Funeral Home in Fairfax, where she displayed her talent as a mortician and a trade embalmer; and

Whereas, on October 2, 1967, she was united in holy matrimony to Brookie Priester, Jr., and they were blessed with four children. Mrs. Priester was survived by her beloved husband and two loving children, Adrian Priester and Vonda Orr, but their twin boys preceded her in death; and

Whereas, for several years, she served at numerous funeral homes throughout the State: Johnson Funeral Home in Bamberg, Green’s Funeral Home in Blackville, Peeples’ Funeral Home in Walterboro, and Wright’s Funeral Home in Denmark; and

Whereas, Mrs. Priester ventured into independent business ownership at Riley’s Funeral Home Hampton Chapel, Inc., in Hampton and served as a loyal member of the South Carolina Funeral Service Board, the board’s first black female; and

Whereas, the epitome of professionalism, she became not only the first black female coroner in Allendale County, but also in the entire State and founded Hampton County Minority Business League; and

Whereas, devoted to her family, she sought to include the staff as part of her family and imparted to them the value of teamwork and community and the importance of charity and giving to others; and

Whereas, Den Priester had an innate concern for others and would often use her own resources to help people in the community with their problems rather than wait for someone else to help; and

Whereas, with strong commitment to her community, she was involved with the Neighborhood Service Center, Community Softball Team of Fairfax, Fidelity Chapter #40, Order of the Eastern Star, Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria Capers Lodge Chapter #4, and Pioneer Lodge #154; and

Whereas, Mrs. Priester served as an emergency medical technician with Allendale and Hampton counties, and as a member of the South Carolina Mortician Association, Allendale County Rural Health Board, and Allendale County School Board; and

Whereas, she attended Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where she served as a trustee, a missionary, and an overseer of the youth department, and throughout her adult life, Mrs. Priester valued her relationship with God and spent hours studying and sharing the Word of God with others; and

Whereas, the South Carolina House of Representatives is deeply grateful for the life and legacy of this daughter of the Palmetto State who passed away on February 11, 2015. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

That the members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, by this resolution, celebrate and honor the life of Virginia Riley “Den” Priester, South Carolina’s first black female coroner, for her significant contributions to our State and to her community.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be provided to the family of Virginia Riley “Den” Priester.

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