**A** **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

TO HONOR THE LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF AMERICAN EDUCATOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST SEPTIMA POINSETTE CLARK OF CHARLESTON COUNTY (1898‑1987).

Whereas, born May 3, 1898, in Charleston, Septima Poinsette Clark was an American educator and civil rights activist. Her own experience of racial discrimination fueled her pursuit of racial equality and her commitment to strengthen the African‑American community through literacy and citizenship; and

Whereas, Septima Poinsette was the second of eight children. In 1916, she finished twelfth grade, and, unable financially to attend Fisk University as her teachers had hoped, and forbidden as an African American to teach in the Charleston public schools at that time, Poinsette took the state examination that would permit her to teach in rural areas. Her first job was on Johns Island. The racial inequity of teachers’ salaries and facilities she experienced while there motivated her to become an advocate for change; and

Whereas, she left Johns Island in 1919 in order to teach and campaign for a law allowing black teachers in the Charleston public schools. The same year that the law was passed (1920), Septima Poinsette married Nerie Clark, a navy cook. The marriage ended five years later when Nerie Clark died of kidney failure. Clark returned to teaching on John’s Island until 1927, when she moved to Columbia. There she continued to teach and pursue her own education, studying during summers at Columbia University in New York City and with W.E.B. Du Bois at Atlanta University in Georgia; and

Whereas, she received a bachelor’s degree from Benedict College in Columbia in 1942 and a master’s degree from Hampton (Virginia) Institute (now Hampton University) in 1945. During this time, she was also active in several social and civic organizations, among them the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), with which she campaigned, along with attorney Thurgood Marshall, for equal pay for black teachers in Columbia. In an effort to diminish the effectiveness of the NAACP, South Carolina’s state legislature banned state employees from being associated with civil rights organizations, and in 1956 Clark left South Carolina for a job in Tennessee, refusing to withdraw from the NAACP; and

Whereas, in Tennessee, she helped found citizenship schools that were designed to aid literacy and foster a sense of political empowerment within the black community. Clark joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1961 as director of education and teaching. In 1962, the SCLC joined with other organizations to form the Voter Education Project, which trained teachers for citizenship schools and assisted in increased voter registration among African Americans. A decade later, due in no small measure to the persistent efforts of Clark and others, the first African Americans since Reconstruction were elected to the U.S. Congress; and

Whereas, after Clark retired from active SCLC work in 1970, she fought for, and won, reinstatement of the teaching pension and back pay that had been canceled when she was dismissed in 1956. She later served two terms on the Charleston County School Board. In 1979, Clark received a Living Legacy Award from President Jimmy Carter. She passed away on Dec. 15, 1987, at Johns Island, leaving behind an enduring legacy of selfless service. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

That the members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, by this resolution, honor the life and achievements of American educator and civil rights activist Septima Poinsette Clark of Charleston County (1898‑1987).

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Septima Poinsette Clark.

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