

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 926

By Ford

A RESOLUTION to honor the family of the N.J. and Vera Ford Family Reunion.

WHEREAS, the family is the basic building block that shapes our society, and the lives of family members, filled with work and play, love and laughter, illness and health, grief and disappointment, and success and achievement shape the course of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the history of our State and nation is woven from the countless threads of the histories of families, and these family chronicles are worthy of our appreciation; and

WHEREAS, between July 27 and July 29, 2012, the members of the N.J. and Vera Ford family will enjoy their Second annual family reunion since the passing of the late N.J. and Vera Ford, as family members gather in South Beach, Florida, to celebrate their distinguished history again, hosted by the Harold Ford, Sr., family; and

WHEREAS, this remarkable family, with an extensive history to public service, traces its roots back to Essex and Jackson Geeter, two slaves who escaped from a Mississippi plantation and traveled to South Memphis, Tennessee over one hundred forty years ago; Essex was elected to the County School Board soon after arriving in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the Geeter family united with the Ford family when Lewie C. Ford married Ophelia Edna Geeter, joining two publicly active families as Lewie Ford's father, Newton F. Ford, was elected to the Shelby County Court in 1888 and in 1870 was one of the founders of The Old Folks Society, which was a small prestigious group that focused on local history; and

WHEREAS, Lewie Ford opened the first Ford family undertaking business and also worked as a sharecropper and car service owner, while Ophelia Ford became the first black school teacher in Shelby County, being a graduate of Lemoyne Normal Institute; and

WHEREAS, their son, Newton Jackson "N.J." Ford, was brought into the family mortuary business after the death of his father; and

WHEREAS, N.J. Ford then married Vera Myrtless Davis, whom he met while working at the Peabody Hotel as the Keeper of the legendary Peabody ducks; the bride was the daughter of John Davis, an employee of Goldsmith's department store, and Lottie Davis, a homemaker, and the sister of John "Son" Davis, Jr. and Charles "Wiggie" Davis; and

WHEREAS, after the couple was joined in holy matrimony, N.J. Ford opened his own mortuary business in 1932, N.J. Ford Funeral Parlor; and

WHEREAS, still in operation today, N.J. Ford & Sons Funeral Parlor has been an established pillar of the Memphis business community for many years, and N.J. Ford's business acumen and commitment to quality service have been passed down to the next generations; and

WHEREAS, N.J. and Vera Ford were the proud parents of thirteen children, the late N.J., Jr. (died at the age of two), Barbara, Melvin, Lewie, Joyce Ann, John, Emmitt, Harold, Vera, the late James, Ophelia, Joseph, and Edmund, and saw to it that each of the twelve received a college education; and

WHEREAS, instilled with the family history of public service, this generation of the Ford family would scale heights never dreamed of one hundred years earlier, as Harold Ford first won election to the Tennessee General Assembly, and then to the U.S. House of Representatives for twenty-two years as the first African-American to be elected to Congress from Tennessee, and from the South; and

WHEREAS, John Ford served on the City Council of Memphis and would later win election to the State Senate, where he held office for more than thirty years; and

WHEREAS, Emmitt Ford would serve in the House of Representatives of the Tennessee General Assembly, and the late James Ford was elected to the Memphis City Council, and later the Shelby County Commission; and

WHEREAS, Joe Ford worked at the family business while serving on the Memphis City Council; he also served on the Shelby County Commission for many years, and was appointed by his peers on the Commission to serve as interim Shelby County Mayor in 2009-2010; and

WHEREAS, Edmund Ford would also win election to the Memphis City Council, while our colleague, Ophelia Edna Ford, became the first female member of the Ford family to run for political office; she is currently serving her second full term as State Senator; and

WHEREAS, the family legacy of public service would be passed on as Congressman Harold Ford Sr.'s son, Harold, Jr., would go on to win election to the U.S. House of Representatives and follow in his father's footsteps for a period of ten years; and

WHEREAS, Edmund Ford, Jr., Edmund Sr.'s son, presently serves on the Memphis City Council, and Justin Ford, Joseph Sr.'s son, is a member of the Shelby County Commission; and

WHEREAS, the N.J. and Vera Ford family of Memphis has an impressive list of public service accolades, but also includes highly successful and prominent men and women in nearly every profession, including published authors, doctors, lawyers, professors, realtors, film makers, entrepreneurs, teachers, investment bankers, and pastors and ministers; and

WHEREAS, it is evident that the N.J. and Vera Ford family has deep, well-established roots in the Volunteer State, and we take great pleasure in joining in their celebration of family pride; and

WHEREAS, this legislative body is also pleased to recognize the many descendants of this strong and vital family of our State as they gather to remember their triumphs and accomplishments, recall various historical events in their family, and exchange news of current affairs; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the members of the N.J. and Vera Ford Family Reunion and wish them a wonderful time together as they renew family connections and revisit their wonderful shared family history and memories.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.