

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 824

By McNally

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Paul W. Harper of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Paul W. Harper, a second father and mentor to generations of college students and a successful businessman and restaurateur who was a passionate advocate for North Nashville and its Jefferson Street business corridor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Harper began his illustrious business career in the 1970s when he opened several convenience stores that also sold gasoline; believing strongly in diversification, he also owned and operated a farm and a real estate agency; and

WHEREAS, at the encouragement of his son Dylan, Mr. Harper opened another convenience store on Jefferson Street and enjoyed great success in the heart of North Nashville for the next thirty-five years; and

WHEREAS, when his fried chicken and potato wedges became popular with his customers, Mr. Harper decided to expand his horizons by opening Harper's Restaurant and Rapid Catering, the only dine-in cafeteria and banquet-style restaurant on Jefferson Street; and

WHEREAS, igniting the revitalization of Jefferson Street, Harper's served good food that attracted people of all races and from all walks of life and consistently won JUMP's People's Choice Best Restaurant Award; and

WHEREAS, generations of students from Tennessee State University (TSU), Fisk University, and Meharry Medical College affectionately called Mr. Harper "Pops," for he served as their surrogate father in their collegiate home away from home; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Harper was renowned for taking students under his wing and serving as their life and business mentor, helping them develop into young adults; and

WHEREAS, no student was ever denied a meal at Harper's because of his or her inability to pay; the admiration, respect, and affection that the community felt for Mr. Harper is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that many of these students returned to the restaurant after graduation to pay their outstanding tabs; and

WHEREAS, he was a stalwart supporter of TSU's athletic teams and received the TSU Tiger Award sponsored by the *Nashville Banner* and the Loyal Support Award from TSU's Aristocrat of Bands; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the *Tennessee Tribune* honored Paul W. Harper and Senator Thelma M. Harper as Nashville's Public Servants for "their dedication and determination to improve North Nashville, as well as others, to a better Tennessee for positive exposure globally"; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Harper received the Minority Business Achievement Award in recognition of his business success and his many contributions to the community; and

WHEREAS, at the age of seventy-six, Mr. Harper retired and sold Harper's in 2015; his final contribution to the revitalization of Jefferson Street was refusing higher offers to sell the business to the "right buyer," one who shared his vision of reinvesting in North Nashville by maintaining his original concept of a family restaurant, while building on its previous success and reputation; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Harper is survived by his wife and our beloved colleague, Senator Thelma M. Harper; his daughter and son-in-law, Linda and Bobby; his goddaughters, Donna Wallace and Regina Kinnard; his godson, King Dunlap V; his sisters-in-law, Lula Harper, Helen Harper, and Neely Ann Harper; his brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Dennis and Gwendolyn Claybrooks; his brother-in-law, John G. Claybrooks; his nephew, H. Kenneth (Elizabeth) Harper and family; his nieces, May Kinnard and Frankie More; his close friend, Charlene Stuart; his devoted friends, King (Robin) Dunlap IV and family; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and close family friends; and

WHEREAS, he was preceded in death by his parents, Willie Van and Nellie Lou Harper; his beloved son, Dylan W. Harper; three sisters, Anna L. Sullivan, Stella B. Wright, and Beatrice B. Wright; and three brothers, Johnnie Harper, Arthur Harper, and Nelson Harper; and

WHEREAS, Paul W. Harper devoted his life to improving social and economic conditions in North Nashville and Jefferson Street, and it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should remember this exceptional public servant, businessman, and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we celebrate the bountiful life of Paul W. Harper, while paying tribute to his memory.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to Senator Harper and the family and many friends of Paul W. Harper.

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