

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 6

Senators Brinks and Nesbitt offered the following concurrent resolution:

1 A concurrent resolution of tribute offered as a memorial for
2 Virgil Clark Smith, former member of the Michigan Senate and
3 Michigan House of Representatives.

4 Whereas, It was with great sorrow that the members of the
5 Legislature learned about the passing of Virgil Clark Smith. A
6 dedicated public servant for over 40 years, he was a trailblazer
7 who served his community with courage, dignity, compassion, and
8 integrity. He will be remembered as a dedicated public servant and
9 justice-seeker by his constituents in Wayne County and the people
10 of our great state; and

11 Whereas, A Detroit native, Virgil Clark Smith graduated from
12 Pershing High School in 1965. He remained in Michigan to continue
13 his education, receiving a bachelor's degree in political science

1 from Michigan State University and a juris doctor from Wayne State
2 University Law School; and

3 Whereas, After law school, Virgil Clark Smith began his long
4 career in public service, which included serving as a legal advisor
5 to community groups for Wayne County Legal Services and as senior
6 assistant corporation counsel for the City of Detroit Law
7 Department; and

8 Whereas, In 1976, Virgil Clark Smith won a tough primary,
9 defeating the incumbent, and made his way to the Capitol the
10 following year to serve in the House of Representatives, where he
11 would represent the people of the Tenth District for nearly twelve
12 years. During his time in this chamber, he would serve on numerous
13 committees, including as chair of the Committee on Economic
14 Development and Energy and majority vice chair of the Committees on
15 Judiciary and Taxation, while also serving on the Committees on
16 Colleges and Universities, Corrections, Elections, Insurance,
17 Labor, and Tourist Industry Relations, as well as the Joint
18 Committee on Administrative Rules. In addition to his service on
19 standing committees, Virgil Clark Smith was appointed chair of the
20 Joint Legislative Committee on State Assumption of Trial Court
21 Operation, the House Special Committee to Study State Financing of
22 the Courts, and the House Ad Hoc Special Committee to Study State
23 Financing of the Courts. Known as a champion of Detroit, he used
24 those same skills to reorganize the court system. His leadership
25 qualities were recognized by his caucus where he served as a
26 Majority Floor Whip from 1979 to 1982 and as an Assistant Majority
27 Floor Leader from 1983 to 1988. He would remain in the House until
28 1988 when he was elected in a special election to represent the
29 Second District in the state Senate; and

1 Whereas, While in the Senate, Virgil Clark Smith represented
2 part of East Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck. Noted for his
3 quick grasp of issues, his knowledge of the legislative process,
4 and a sensitivity to the needs of Michigan citizens, he was a
5 significant figure while serving in the minority. Moreover, he was
6 known for his pursuit of fairness through the law and being a
7 strong voice on policy questions. Never afraid of a challenge, he
8 worked in a bipartisan fashion to reorganize Detroit Public Schools
9 despite immense pressure. His work continued through the committee
10 process where he served as minority vice chair of the Committees on
11 Families, Mental Health and Human Services; Finance; Gaming and
12 Casino Oversight; and Government Operations. Additionally, he
13 served on the Committees on Banking and Financial Institutions;
14 Family Law, Criminal Law, and Corrections; Judiciary; and Local
15 Government and Veterans; as well as the Committee on Appropriations
16 and its Capital Outlay, Regulatory, and Transportation
17 Subcommittees. He also served on the Legislative Council and was a
18 member of the Michigan Legislative Black Caucus. From 1995 to 2000,
19 he served as the Senate Democratic Floor Leader, the first African
20 American to hold the position. Recognized with numerous awards, in
21 1996 he was voted Legislator of the Year by both the Michigan
22 Judges Association and the Police Officers Association of Michigan;
23 and

24 Whereas, After leaving the Legislature, Virgil Clark Smith
25 served in the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, where he was
26 appointed as a division chief of legislation and community
27 outreach. In 2004, he was appointed as a judge to the Wayne County
28 Circuit Court by Governor Jennifer Granholm. From 2009 to 2014,
29 Virgil Clark Smith served as the chief judge, once again blazing a

1 trail by becoming the first African American to hold such a
2 position. Virgil Clark Smith would serve on the bench until he
3 retired in 2018; and

4 Whereas, Virgil Clark Smith's dedication to his community went
5 beyond the nine-to-five jobs that he held. He served as the chair
6 of the Mayor of Detroit's Task Force on Arson, as the secretary of
7 Consolidated Black Economic Development Inc., and as the vice
8 president of the Seven-Mile-Ryan Emery Block Club. Virgil also
9 served as an executive board member of the Kappa Alpha Psi
10 fraternity, Inner City Drug Abuse Inc., and New Detroit.

11 Additionally, he was a member of the NAACP, the National Bar
12 Association, the Wolverine Bar Association, the State Bar of
13 Michigan, and the Detroit Strategic Planning Commission; and

14 Whereas, Virgil Clark Smith is remembered by his friends,
15 family, and colleagues as a tenacious man who was not afraid to
16 fight for his constituents or what he thought was right. Throughout
17 his illustrious career, Virgil Clark Smith always maintained a high
18 level of professionalism and conducted himself with dignity.
19 Respected by colleagues and staff on both sides of the aisle, many
20 considered him to be the ideal political mentor; and

21 Whereas, Outside of his work, Virgil Clark Smith enjoyed
22 riding his motor scooter, kayaking on the Detroit River, and
23 spending time with his family. He is survived by his wife,
24 Elizabeth; four children, Virgil, Adam, Anthony, and Jordan; and
25 two grandchildren; and

26 Whereas, Upon Virgil Clark Smith's passing, we offer our
27 condolences to his loved ones. His contributions to these chambers
28 and the state of Michigan will be remembered; now, therefore, be it

29 Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives

1 concurring), That we offer this expression of our highest tribute
2 to honor the memory of Virgil Clark Smith, a member of Michigan's
3 House of Representatives from 1977 to 1988 and the Michigan Senate
4 from 1988 to 2000; and be it further

5 Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the
6 Smith family as evidence of our lasting esteem for his memory.