

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

23-229

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

January 7, 2020

To recognize Religious Freedom Day, and to declare Thursday, January 16, 2020, as “Religious Freedom Day” in the District of Columbia.

WHEREAS, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (the “Statute”), which was written by Thomas Jefferson and championed by James Madison and served as the forerunner to the approach to religion and government taken by the Framers of the Constitution in 1787, was enacted on January 16, 1786;

WHEREAS, religious freedom is a fundamental American and human right and a cornerstone of democracy, a right for all rather than a privilege for the few, and this fundamental right applies to people of all and of no religious affiliations or beliefs;

WHEREAS, the Statute insists on equality as a guiding and governing principle, specifying that one’s religious identity should be neither an advantage nor a disadvantage under the law;

WHEREAS, the Statute declared that all people “...shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities,” and that Thomas Jefferson later said that religious freedom encompasses “the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the [Muslim], the [Hindu], and infidel of every denomination;”

WHEREAS, these principles are not only foundational, but remain essential to the health and future of our democracy, and the government may not favor one religion over another, or over nonreligion, without fatally undermining religious freedom;

WHEREAS, these principles should guide and inform judicial decisions, legislation, and public policy making at all levels of government;

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WHEREAS, in 1992, Congress designated January 16th as Religious Freedom Day to celebrate the enactment of the Statute, stipulating only that it be commemorated by a presidential proclamation; and

WHEREAS, the Statute was central in shaping one of the highest aspirations of the American experiment: religious freedom;

WHEREAS, uplifting the true meaning of religious freedom is especially important in today's political climate, in which anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are rife and religion freedom is improperly evoked to justify attacks on the human rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people;

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the "Religious Freedom Day Recognition Resolution of 2020".

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia recognizes the religious freedom of all residents of the District of Columbia, commemorates the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom on January 16, 1786, and declares Thursday, January 16, 2020 as "Religious Freedom Day" in the District of Columbia.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon the first date of publication in the District of Columbia Register.