

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 62

By Staples

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Avon Rollins, Sr., of
Knoxville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Avon Rollins, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins was a civil rights icon who dedicated his life to making the world a better and more equal place for all, and with his passing at the age of seventy-five, he will be remembered as one of history's and Tennessee's great heroes; and

WHEREAS, born September 16, 1941, Avon Rollins, Sr., often joked that he was born across the street from the Knoxville Civic Coliseum, and he made it his life's work to improve the civil rights of his fellow citizens in his hometown and across the nation; and

WHEREAS, one of the University of Tennessee's first generation of black students, the engineering major was an active fighter for civil rights during the tumultuous era of the 1960s in Knoxville and beyond. Mr. Rollins famously laid down in front of the Tennessee Theatre to protest segregation, an act of peaceful resistance that got him arrested; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins was a founding member and leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and he helped drive the cause throughout the country in places such as Danville, Virginia; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Selma, Alabama; and many locations in Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Rollins was a part of the leadership that created the historic March on Washington, which featured the famed "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man he considered a role model and mentor; and

WHEREAS, even though he faced fire hoses, baseball bats, attack dogs, jail time, and armored tanks, Avon Rollins, Sr., was not deterred in his pursuit of civil rights; and

WHEREAS, though proud of the achievements he and his generation accomplished in the fight for civil rights, Mr. Rollins believed that there is plenty of work to be done toward the social and economic improvement of minorities, and he hoped to pass the baton to a new generation to carry on the march toward equality; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins was the former executive director of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, which now has a wing named in his honor. Mr. Rollins retired from the TVA Minority Economic Development Division; and

WHEREAS, to honor Mr. Rollins in 2015, Knoxville named and dedicated the "Avon W. Rollins Sr. Overpass" on Cherry Street below the Interstate 40 bridge in tribute to his enduring legacy; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Y. Nichols, president and CEO of Knoxville Area Urban League said, "It's hard to have a conversation about the civil rights movement in Knoxville without mentioning the name of Avon Rollins. ...the 'face' of civil rights in our area often has included this remarkable servant leader."; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins was an active and devout member of the Greater Warner Tabernacle AME Zion Church, which he served faithfully for many years as a member; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Rollins was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins, Sr., enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife of forty-three years, Sheryl Rollins, and he was the proud parent of Avon Rollins, Jr. and Avondria Rollins; and

WHEREAS, Avon Rollins will be sorely missed by his seven grandchildren, eleven great-grandchildren, and a host of family and friends; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Rollins leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Avon Rollins, Sr., reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Rollins.

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