

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1036

By Hardaway

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Marvis LaVerne  
Kneeland Jones of Memphis.

WHEREAS, we were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Marvis LaVerne Kneeland Jones of Memphis, an influential educator and civil rights activist whose life was defined by her passion for education, commitment to equality, and advocacy for children; and

WHEREAS, Marvis LaVerne Jones drew national attention in 1959 as a member of the Memphis State Eight, the first eight Black students to pass the entrance exam and enroll in Memphis State University, now known as the University of Memphis, after the federally mandated desegregation of the Southern school system; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Jones's survival of a car accident at the age of eight that proved fatal for her mother was the source of the strength and determination she displayed throughout her life in her various chosen roles; and

WHEREAS, born in Chicago, Illinois, on February 1, 1941, to James Henry and Gladys Robinson Kneeland, Mrs. Jones was less than one year old when her family settled in Memphis. She attended Douglass High School before transferring to Hamilton High School; and

WHEREAS, a talented musician, Mrs. Jones became a classically trained pianist and soloist while a teenager, and she served as president and director of the Hamilton High Glee Club; and

WHEREAS, after graduating as Salutatorian from Hamilton High School in 1958, Mrs. Jones pursued an undergraduate degree at Memphis State University in 1959; she suspended her college education after facing significant discrimination; and

WHEREAS, during her hiatus from school, Mrs. Jones married the future Tennessee State Representative Rufus Elmer Jones, Sr., and gave birth to four children; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Marvis LaVerne Jones graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Memphis State University and later completed a Master of Science degree in Education at Memphis State; and

WHEREAS, while an undergraduate student, Mrs. Jones worked as a secretary for the NAACP; after completing her master's degree, she became an educator with Memphis City Schools, where she served for twenty-five years; and

WHEREAS, after retiring from teaching, Mrs. Jones worked as a public relations manager for REJ & Associates, a government relations consulting company founded by her husband; she also supported her husband's successful campaign for State representative by organizing voter registration drives in Shelby County; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Jones and her husband, Representative Jones, owned and operated Jones Big Star #102 grocery store for two decades until 1992 when they sold the store; and

WHEREAS, as one of the Memphis State Eight, Mrs. Jones helped paved the way for other African-American students to attend the University of Memphis; she was thusly honored with several awards for her role in desegregating the university, including the Arthur S. Holman Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Memphis and lifetime membership in the NAACP. She was also named as a civil rights pioneer by the local Memphis NAACP Chapter; and

WHEREAS, the University of Memphis also established the Memphis State Eight Best Paper Prize in 2000 for the best historical paper on the African-American experience in honor of Mrs. Jones and her colleagues; and

WHEREAS, Marvis LaVerne Jones was active in several community organizations; she served as a charter member of the Shelby County (TN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, the Friends of Memphis and Shelby County Libraries, and the Tennessee Education Association; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Jones evinced her religious beliefs as a member of Washington Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, she was among five surviving students of the eight students comprising the Memphis State Eight to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of their pioneering roles in desegregation; the event took place at the University of Memphis in 2019; and

WHEREAS, Marvis LaVerne Jones's most notable contributions are chronicled in selected oral history segments in digital archives of *The History Makers* in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, in addition to serving as a civil rights pioneer and educator, she was a devoted wife and loving mother; and

WHEREAS, she was preceded in death by her husband of fifty-seven years, Representative Rufus E. Jones, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her children, Dr. Gladys A. Jones, Rufus E. (Jill) Jones, Jr., Dr. Ida L. Jones (Michael) Pittman, and Dorothy D. Jones, she is survived by five grandchildren and a host of friends and family members across the country; and

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

WHEREAS, it is fitting that we should remember the bountiful life of this exceptional community leader and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Marvis LaVerne Kneeland Jones, reflecting fondly upon her impeccable character and her 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 Mrs. Jones.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.