

HOUSE RESOLUTION 148

By Cooper B

A RESOLUTION honoring Sister Sandra O. Smithson, founder of Smithson Craighead Academy, Nashville's first charter school.

WHEREAS, it is fitting for the members of this General Assembly to pause in their deliberations to salute those citizens who, through their remarkable efforts, have distinguished themselves by seeking social justice through spirituality and faith; and

WHEREAS, Franciscan Sister Sandra O. Smithson is the personification of internal motivations and external works which have wrought monumental transformation in the lives of poor minority children who are highly susceptible to school failure; and

WHEREAS, now eighty-five years old, Sister Smithson grew up in north Nashville, the sixth of ten children. Her family was poor, but her parents respected the value of education and taught the importance of charity towards others. Each of the children exhibited unfailing school attendance and went on to graduate from college; and

WHEREAS, Sister Smithson was formally educated in Catholic schools in the Nashville area and attended Xavier University in New Orleans, where she pursued a degree in language arts; and

WHEREAS, of greater importance was her education in humility and humanity, earned at the behest of a mother who implored her children to go into their neighborhoods to visit and care for the sick, elderly, and lonely; and

WHEREAS, for five decades, Sister Smithson has been a member and an educator with the School Sisters of St. Francis, an international congregation of Catholic Religious Sisters. In that fellowship, she has traveled the country and the world as a teacher and a seeker of opportunity for children; and

WHEREAS, as a child of the Great Depression and the segregated South, Sister Smithson's experiential knowledge, coupled with her deep spirituality, has fueled her life's work. Teaching is her testimony to faith, and she continues working faithfully to cure the damage done by poverty and disparity by giving to children the gifts of vocabulary, critical thinking, and caring; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, Sister Smithson founded Project Reflect, an intensive reading program that has matured into a full-fledged, non-profit organization. Under her determined leadership, Project Reflect opened Nashville's first public charter school, Smithson Craighead Academy Elementary School, in 2003 in an effort to provide basic skills mastery to children, enhancing their opportunities for later school success; and

WHEREAS, yearning to provide pathways to success through education to more children, Project Reflect launched the Smithson Craighead Academy Middle School in 2009; and

WHEREAS, the 2011 year yielded many laurels for Sister Smithson, who was recognized by both the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a lifetime of superior accomplishments and an exemplary record of performance in the realm of education. In March, she received the St. Katharine National Justice Award for her commitment to a just education for all, as well as the In Full Motion Distinguished Service Award for instilling the gift of hope and promise in the lives of young people. In June, she received the Greater Nashville Black School Educators Lifetime Achievement Award for the successful teaching methods she evinces; and

WHEREAS, the success of the State of Tennessee, the strength of our communities, and the overall vitality of our society depend, in great measure, on the dedication of people like Sister Smithson, who use their considerable talents and resources to transform vulnerable children from a culture of poverty to a culture of learning and advancement; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberation to acknowledge and applaud Sister Sandra O. Smithson for her many contributions to the good

people of Tennessee, her unfaltering commitment to children, and her powerful leadership in education innovation and character development; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we recognize the outstanding achievements of Sister Sandra O. Smithson, applaud her life's mission to educate and develop the character of children and youth and the successes she has brought forth in the development of charter education in Tennessee, and we give our utmost gratitude to her for her commitment to the successful education of those in need.

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