

Senate Resolution 979

By: Senator Tarver of the 22nd

A RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing and commending Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance began in the 1920's as Pilgrim Benevolent
3 Aid Association, collecting small amounts of money from families once a week or so and
4 placing the money in a "benevolent" fund that would guarantee the paid-up policyholder a
5 "decent" burial; and

6 WHEREAS, Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance was not only the largest black-owned life
7 insurance company in the United States, it was also the largest employer of
8 African-Americans in Augusta, Georgia and several other cities around the South; and

9 WHEREAS, it was also very successful at diversifying its products over the years, and by
10 the 1930's the Augusta company was writing standard insurance policies and doing business
11 in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida; and

12 WHEREAS, by the 1940's it had more than a million dollars in assets; and

13 WHEREAS, of greatest note is that this remarkable company was founded by an equally
14 remarkable Augusta teenager, Solomon W. Walker, who believed selling benevolent
15 insurance to blacks, who had little or no access to insurance of any kind, was a winner for
16 both the policyholder and the entrepreneur; and

17 WHEREAS, the young Mr. Walker got the idea while delivering groceries in Augusta and
18 all he needed was \$25 to obtain a state certificate to start his own insurance company, so he
19 set about raising the money by turning to family and friends; and

20 WHEREAS, the little company opened for business in 1898, and with the fire for success
21 that brands all true salesmen, three young men hit the streets selling policies; and

1 WHEREAS, the company was successful because offering only burial insurance made the
2 premiums affordable for most black prospects, the community got behind the little enterprise,
3 spawned and built by blacks for blacks, and burial insurance filled a terrific need in the black
4 community; and

5 WHEREAS, in 1905 the company merged with other small companies to create the much
6 more diversified Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance Company and it grew quickly over the
7 next 40 years, making Laney-Walker Boulevard the very anchor of black business in
8 Augusta;

9 WHEREAS, on its 50th anniversary in 1948, the company had paid \$14 million in benefits,
10 while providing executive, clerical, and sales jobs for more than 700 blacks, making it the
11 largest black-owned employer in Augusta; and

12 WHEREAS, in 1990 the company merged with Atlanta Life Insurance Company and moved
13 its headquarters to Atlanta; and

14 WHEREAS, in many ways, Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance literally changed the look and
15 outlook of Augusta's black workers.

16 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
17 join in recognizing and commending Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance for its valuable
18 contributions to the Augusta community and this state.

19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
20 to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance.