

House Resolution 43

By: Representatives Bruce of the 61st, Willard of the 51st, McClain of the 100th, Smyre of the 135th, Mabra of the 63rd, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and memory of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr., and inviting his family
2 to be recognized by the House of Representatives; and for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, the State of Georgia mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished citizens
4 with the passing of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr., on November 15, 2014; and

5 WHEREAS, HJ was born on December 23, 1930, in the Summerhill Community of Atlanta,
6 Georgia, the youngest son of Maggie Goodson Russell and Rogers Russell, Sr.; and

7 WHEREAS, his spirit of entrepreneurship emerged early; he had a paper route and opened
8 a shoeshine parlor while he was still in elementary school; and

9 WHEREAS, he attended David T. Howard High School and during summers worked with
10 his father as a subcontractor, learning to be a master tradesman and mechanic; he followed
11 his father's advice to save a portion of every dollar earned, and by the age of 16, saved
12 enough money to purchase a vacant lot from the city of Atlanta, where he built his first rental
13 property, a duplex; and

14 WHEREAS, HJ worked as a plasterer while earning a degree in building construction from
15 Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (later Tuskegee University); and

16 WHEREAS, while still a senior at Tuskegee, HJ established the business that would be
17 known as H.J. Russell & Company, and after graduation, he returned to Atlanta and began
18 his career, providing real estate services that included plastering, property management, and
19 construction; and

20 WHEREAS, HJ worked publicly and behind the scene to improve the business environment
21 for African Americans, opening doors and removing obstacles wherever possible; and

22 WHEREAS, during the Civil Rights Movement, he joined other African American business
23 leaders in providing advice and counsel as well as financial and political support to the
24 movement; and

25 WHEREAS, he was part of the group that financed the *Atlanta Inquirer*, a newspaper
26 devoted to unadulterated news from the frontlines of the Civil Rights Movement; and

27 WHEREAS, HJ's civic involvement brought him into lasting relationships with many of
28 Atlanta's prominent politicians, business leaders, and Civil Rights activists, including Atlanta
29 Mayor Ivan Allen; Georgia Senator Leroy Johnson; political activist QV Williamson;
30 renowned Atlanta businessman Jesse Hill, Jr.; and most notably Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
31 and his family; and

32 WHEREAS, during the 1970s, he became the largest single owner and manager of HUD
33 apartments in Georgia, developed, owned, and constructed over \$150 million of real estate,
34 acquired interests in Citizens Trust Bank, an ABC affiliate television station, a beverage
35 distribution company, airport concessions, insurance, and other ventures; and

36 WHEREAS, in 1974, he co-chaired the finance committee to elect Maynard Jackson as
37 Atlanta's first black mayor; and

38 WHEREAS, HJ was the first black member of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and in
39 1980 was elected president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the second African
40 American to hold that position; and

41 WHEREAS, he was the first African American to have ownership in a major sports franchise
42 with his acquisition of 10 percent of the Atlanta Hawks professional basketball team and the
43 Atlanta Flames hockey team; and

44 WHEREAS, his company was involved in the building of much of the Atlanta skyline and
45 built such landmarks as Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the Georgia Dome,
46 Philips Arena, and Turner Field; and

47 WHEREAS, he retired from H.J. Russell & Company in 2003, but continued to devote his
48 energies to his legacy projects in the Castleberry Hill area, which included Paschal's
49 Restaurant; and

50 WHEREAS, he released his autobiography, *Building Atlanta: How I Broke Through*
51 *Segregation to Launch a Business Empire*, in April of 2015; and

52 WHEREAS, HJ cemented his legacy through civic leadership, serving on numerous boards,
53 including Central Atlanta Progress, the Butler Street YMCA, Citizens Trust Bank, the
54 Atlanta Chapter of the NAACP, Allen Temple AME Church, and the Business Council of
55 Georgia; and

56 WHEREAS, an active philanthropist, he supported a wide range of worthy causes, including
57 education in the form of multi-million-dollar pledges to Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse
58 College, Georgia State University, and his alma mater, Tuskegee University, and he provided
59 a million-dollar contribution to Grady Hospital at a time when the hospital was threatened
60 by financial distress; and

61 WHEREAS, HJ helped to create the Atlanta Action Forum, which provided 6,500 summer
62 jobs for at-risk youth, and when the need arose for \$30 million to keep the Martin Luther
63 King, Jr., papers in Atlanta, HJ was one of the business leaders who signed the note and
64 recruited others to do the same; and

65 WHEREAS, in 1991, he received the prestigious Horatio Alger Award, recognizing
66 dedicated community leaders who demonstrate individual initiative and a commitment to
67 excellence; and

68 WHEREAS, HJ was a loving father and grandfather to daughter, Donata Russell Major; sons,
69 H. Jerome Russell and Michael Russell; stepsons, Eric and Kevin Anderson; and
70 grandchildren, Herman "Russ" Russell, III, Zane Major, Jr., Sydney Russell, Emanuel
71 "Manny" Major, Mori Russell, Michael Russell, Jr., Benjamin Russell, and Kelsey Russell;
72 and

73 WHEREAS, he was a person of magnanimous strengths with an unimpeachable reputation
74 for integrity, intelligence, fairness, and kindness, and by the example he made of his life, he
75 made this world a better place in which to live.

76 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
77 the members of this body join in honoring the life and memory of Herman Jerome "HJ"
78 Russell, Sr., express their deepest and most sincere regret at his passing, and invite his family

79 to be recognized by the House of Representatives at a date and time to be determined by the
80 Speaker of the House of Representatives.

81 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
82 and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the
83 family of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr.