



## **PROCLAMATION HONORING EUGENE AND LORRAINE WILLIAMS**

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams, natives of Charlottesville and Ivy, who attended segregated public schools; and

**WHEREAS**, after graduating from Jefferson High School in Charlottesville, Eugene Williams attended Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and

**WHEREAS**, also after graduating from Jefferson High School, Lorraine Williams earned a bachelor's degree from Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, and later earned a master's degree from the University of Virginia; and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene Williams served a tour of duty in the United States Army; and

**WHEREAS**, Lorraine Williams began a long career as an educator in Charlottesville Schools, where she taught and influenced hundreds of young people from Charlottesville and Albemarle; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1953, Eugene Williams began a career in the insurance business at Universal Life Insurance Company, eventually earning the title of regional Vice President; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1954 Eugene Williams became president of the Charlottesville Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and was in the forefront of the civil rights movement in Charlottesville for many decades; and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams formed a committee of parents to desegregate the Charlottesville public schools, a committee that was instrumental in desegregating first Venable Elementary School and Lane High School in 1959 despite the state's policy of massive resistance; and

**WHEREAS**, the Williams continued their work for school desegregation, resulting in their own daughters, Karol and Scheryl, winning a legal battle to attend Johnson Elementary School along with two other students in 1962; and

**WHEREAS**, through the efforts of Eugene and Lorraine Williams, widespread integration of Charlottesville City Schools occurred from 1965-1966; and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams protested the loss of the working-class neighborhood of Vinegar Hill, which was razed during Charlottesville's urban renewal efforts, resulting in many African-American homes and more than 30 businesses being demolished; and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams, together with his brother, Albert, and sister-in-law, Emma, responded to Charlottesville's needs by buying and rehabilitating 62 housing units, forming Dogwood Housing to manage and rent the apartments, creating attractive and affordable housing in the city, and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams owned the successful property management company until they sold it in 2007; and

**WHEREAS**, Eugene and Lorraine Williams' mission has been to erase segregation and help the less fortunate in Charlottesville;

***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED*** that we, the members of the Charlottesville School Board, join with Charlottesville City Council in expressing respect and gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Williams for their unwavering determination as civil rights leaders who worked to provide equal opportunity for all people in Charlottesville.

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Language on historic marker installed at Johnson School on October 23, 2019:

**NAACP CIVIL RIGHTS VICTORY:  
INTEGRATION OF JOHNSON SCHOOL, 1962**

In 1962, Johnson Elementary School became the third Charlottesville public school to desegregate due to a lawsuit brought by the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Initially, to avoid

court-ordered desegregation at Venable Elementary School and Lane High School, those two schools were closed for five months during 1958-59 as part of “massive resistance.” Following a modified school reopening in the spring and an additional NAACP court victory in the fall, on September 8, 1959, twelve black students began attending Venable Elementary and Lane High School. However, further integration was minimized, and the other city schools remained segregated. To address this, Charlottesville’s NAACP President, Eugene Williams, and his wife, Lorraine — herself a teacher in Charlottesville City Schools — sued to allow their daughters’ transfer from all-black Jefferson Elementary into all-white Johnson Elementary. Fifteen other students and their parents were part of the suit, seeking transfers to Venable and Lane. Appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, *Dillard v. School Board of the City of Charlottesville* ultimately forced Charlottesville City Schools to stop the discriminatory handling of school transfer requests. Consequently, on October 24, 1962, Johnson Elementary was integrated by Karol and Scheryl Williams and by Michael Lewis and Rosalind Whitlock, whose requests to transfer into Johnson were also approved following the court ruling. Each victory paved the way for greater access to an equal education, and the ruling had significant impact across the state and country. Widespread integration of Charlottesville’s schools occurred from 1965-1966, but the work for true racial equity continues.