

November 24, 2020

Virginia Department of Historic Resources
Attn: Commission for Historical Statues in the United States Capital
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

Re: Barbara Rose Johns - Student Civil Rights Leader

Dear Commission Members,

I write to offer my support on behalf of the Robert Russa Moton Museum (Moton). The Moton Museum is Virginia's only Civil Rights Museum and a National Historic Landmark.

The Moton Museum, housed in the former Robert Russa Moton High School, is the 1951 student walkout site led by 16yr old student Barbara Rose Johns. The Moton Museum promotes and interprets the civil rights history of Prince Edward County and the leading role its citizens played in moving our country from segregation to integration. Barbara Johns is a hero of the civil rights movement whose idea, passion and creativity helped to spark significant change in our country.

We believe that Barbara Rose John's, a student civil rights activist, should represent the Commonwealth of Virginia in the US Capitol National Hall Statuary Collection. Her likeness would make a powerful statement to those who visit the Capitol each year – American visitors, international tourists, and most importantly school children. When she led the walkout at Robert Russa Moton High School alongside her classmates in protest of unequal school conditions, she inspired a call to activism, resulting in a transformative change to our educational system and the Jim Crow laws that held a captive grip over our country. Barbara Johns represents the values of citizenship, democracy, and empowerment that stand at the heart of what we seek to communicate through our work here at the Moton Museum. We believe Barbara Johns meets four of the five criteria outlined in the Commission Values & Attributes.

1. Association with significant events that changed the course of history -

The walkout, organized by Barbara Johns, resulted in the court case, Davis v. Prince Edward County, that was folded into the US Supreme Court case Brown v Board of Education (of Topeka, Kansas). Of the five cases combined into Brown, the Moton School case was the only one led by students. Nearly seventy-five percent of the plaintiffs in Brown v. Board of Education were from Prince Edward County.

2. Exemplification of valor, patriotism, bravery -

While Barbara Johns, at 16 years of age, did not fight during wartime, she was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement. You cannot talk about the Modern Civil Rights movement in this country without first beginning at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia. Barbara's courage and patriotism can be best described as a battle for equality. This is a battle still being fought today. Barbara Johns legacy of activism and courage still positively informs how we fight for justice and equality today. Barbara Rose Johns exhibited immense courage to lead her classmates.

3. The subject's primary historical significance should be tied to Virginia directly or they should have spent the majority of their life in the state -

Barbara Johns grew up in Virginia until she was forced to leave due to retaliation and threats she faced against her life for the heroic action that she took on April 23, 1951. During her time growing up in Virginia, Barbara Johns learned formative life lessons that would guide her for the rest of her life. Honoring Barbara Johns helps to elevate Virginia's significance in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*. Barbara and her family continued to maintain residence at their farm in Darlington Heights, Virginia, along with their Triumph Baptist Church membership.

4. The person should not be in conflict with current prevailing values - Barbara Johns represents the continuing struggle for equity for our Black citizens.

Students of today who visit the Capitol will see themselves in a person like Barbara Johns. This will hopefully give them hope and inspiration that they can also be leaders in our country. There is a strong need for young citizens to see themselves in the faces of those honored in the United States Capitol. The story of Barbara Johns and that of Prince Edward County citizens teaches us about the importance of young citizens using the tools of a constitutional democracy to help bring about change. We must continue to teach about racial justice and equality. Barbara Johns story would help to do just that.

It is time for Virginia to change the narrative of representation in the US Capitol dramatically. As the representative of our Commonwealth, Barbara Rose Johns would help to inspire citizens of all ages to also believe that they can be leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. Farmville, Virginia is the birthplace of the student-led civil rights movement. It was in this rural Virginia Community that young people stepped forward and gave their voice to a movement that would lead to change in our education system and laws. Barbara John's and the strength of her contributions on behalf of her classmates and other citizens of Prince Edward County citizens would offer much-needed diversity to the collection.

Allow us to give voice to a community who gave so much in helping to move our country forward with the inclusion of Barbara Rose Johns statue. Thank you for your work and the contributions you are making on behalf of our great Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Cameron D. Patterson

Cameron Patterson
Executive, Director
Robert R. Moton Museum