HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 2018-4655, by Representative Shea

WHEREAS, With an unwavering conviction that "Almighty God hath created the mind free," Thomas Jefferson drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom; and

WHEREAS, On January 16, 1786, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, a strong statement for freedom of conscience, was passed by the Virginia General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom served as an inspiration and basis for First Amendment protections for religious freedom in the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, Freedom of conscience has been highly valued in our nation since its earliest beginnings, not only by individuals seeking religious freedom in the American colonies but through colonial charters and laws such as the 1658 "Flushing Remonstrance," that guaranteed citizens the freedom "to have and enjoy the liberty of conscience, according to the manner and custom of Holland, without molestation or disturbance"; and

WHEREAS, These values were enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guarantees that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…"; and

WHEREAS, Our Founding Fathers knew as they designed our nation that religious freedom was vital to help strengthen and unite it; and

WHEREAS, In a 1789 letter, George Washington said, "The liberty enjoyed by the people of these States, of worshipping Almighty God agreeably to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights."; and

WHEREAS, Many of the first immigrants to our nation came to these shores motivated by their desire for religious liberty so that they could worship according to the dictates of their own consciences; and

WHEREAS, The right to exercise one's own individual conscience is a critical and essential element in the fabric of American culture and history which serves as a beacon of freedom in the world; and

WHEREAS, Each year the President of the United States declares January 16th to be Religious Freedom Day and calls upon Americans to observe this day through events and activities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That today we proudly look back in history to the passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom on January 16, 1786, recognizing and affirming Religious Freedom Day to commemorate that great historical accomplishment that provided the heart of our First Amendment to the United States Constitution.