

INTRODUCED: April 10, 2023

AN ORDINANCE No. 2023-116

To designate the 5300 block of Marian Street in honor of the late Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper.

Patrons – Ms. Lambert, Mr. Addison and Ms. Newbille

Approved as to form and legality
by the City Attorney

PUBLIC HEARING: MAY 8 2023 AT 6 P.M.

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, the late Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper was a New Jersey citizen who grew up in the city of Richmond, graduated from Armstrong High School, was a resident of the Westwood community, and whose employment career included 18 years as a professional seamstress for Jefferson Manufacturing Company and 17 years with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, the most notable accomplishment of Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper, however, was her staunch persistence in pursuing a lawsuit that successfully challenged the racially discriminatory policies of the public school system for the City of Richmond, which mandated that Ms. Cooper's daughter, Daisy Jane, be bused four miles

AYES: 9 NOES: 0 ABSTAIN: _____

ADOPTED: MAY 8 2023 REJECTED: _____ STRICKEN: _____

to G. W. Carver Elementary School when the whites-only Westhampton Elementary School was within walking distance of her home; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper was represented by attorneys from the law firm of Hill, Tucker, & Marsh in her case that was ultimately heard by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, which found in 1960 that the racially discriminatory policies complained of were, in fact, unconstitutional and unenforceable; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, in the face of continued resistance, it took another year for the ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to be implemented in the form of an order from the United States District Court that all Black students in the city of Richmond be allowed to go to previously whites-only schools, thus opening the way for Ms. Cooper's daughter, Daisy Jane, age 12, to be the first Black student to take classes at Westhampton Junior High School; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper also expanded the educational opportunities for the children of her neighborhood by taking them on field trips using public transportation and not allowing the lack of a personally-owned vehicle be an obstacle; and

WHEREAS, because this designation is honorary only, the provisions of sections 8-7 through 8-10 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended, do not apply to the designation made hereby or to any signs erected pursuant to this ordinance;

NOW, THEREFORE,

THE CITY OF RICHMOND HEREBY ORDAINS:

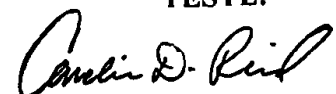
§ 1. **Designation of Street Block for Honorary Names.** The 5300 block of Marian Street shall be designated in honor of Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper pursuant to this ordinance.

§ 2. **Effect of Designation.** The designation of the portion of the street made pursuant to this ordinance shall be honorary only, shall not replace the existing name of the street, and shall have no effect on the address of any property with an address on the designated street block. The sole effect of designation pursuant to this ordinance shall be to authorize the placement of commemorative signs in accordance with this ordinance memorializing the designation in honor of the named person.

§ 3. **Administration of Ordinance.** The Department of Public Works shall implement this ordinance by installing, as soon as practicable after the adoption of this ordinance, and maintaining commemorative signs in accordance with this section. The commemorative signs shall be clearly distinct from the street signs used to identify the portion of the street in question such that a reasonable person could not conclude that the commemorative signs reflect the actual name of the street. The commemorative signs (i) shall be affixed to a sign pole installed at each end of the portion of the street designated in section 1 of this ordinance for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of this section or to any existing sign identifying the portion of the street designated in section 1 of this ordinance located at each end of the portion of the street designated in section 1 of this ordinance and (ii) shall bear the name of the person set forth in section 1 of this ordinance.

§ 4. **Effective Date.** This ordinance shall be in force and effect upon adoption.

**A TRUE COPY:
TESTE:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carlin D. Reed".

City Clerk



Richmond City Council

The Voice of the People

Richmond, Virginia

Office of the Council Chief of Staff

Ordinance/Resolution Request

TO Tabrica Rentz, Deputy City Attorney

THROUGH LaTasha Holmes, Council Chief of Staff

FROM Steven Taylor, Council Policy Analyst

COPY Anne-Francis Lambert, 3rd District Council Member
Andreas Addison, 1st District Council Member
Kiya Stokes, 3rd District Liaison
Whitney Brown, 1st District Liaison

DATE March 29, 2023

PAGE/s 1 of 2

TITLE Honorary Signage – Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper

This is a request for the drafting of an **Ordinance** ☒ **Resolution** ☐

REQUESTING COUNCILMEMBER/PATRON

A.-F. Lambert & A. Addison

SUGGESTED STANDING COMMITTEE

Land Use, Housing & Transportation

ORDINANCE/RESOLUTION SUMMARY

The patron requests that legislation be drafted for Council's consideration requiring the installation of honorary block naming signage at the 5300 block of Marian Street in honor of the late Mrs. Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper.

BACKGROUND

The late Mrs. Boyers Cooper was best known for being a plaintiff during the Civil Rights Era whose federal law suit led to the integration of the City's schools. After Mrs. Boyers Cooper's legal victory, her daughter Daisy was forced to attend Carver Elementary, several miles from her home in Westwood, and not allowed to attend the Westhampton School within walking distance of her home because of segregation policies in the school system. Mrs. Boyers Cooper sued and after several years won her law suit and forcing integration of Richmond's Schools.

Mrs. Boyers Cooper was a seamstress for Jefferson Manufacturing Company and later worked for the State's Department of Motor Vehicles before retiring. She passed away in the Fall of last year.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Fiscal Impact Yes ☐ No ☒

Budget Amendment Required Yes ☐ No ☒

Estimated Cost or Revenue Impact \$ N/A

Note: Costs of signage are usually absorbed from operating funds of DPW.

Attachment/s Yes ☐ No ☒

1:36 P.M. 3/16/2023 60°

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Trailblazer

Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper's actions spurred City's full school desegregation

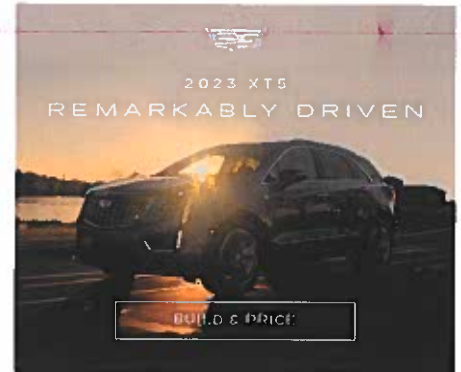
Jeremy M. Lazarus | 11/10/2022, 6 p.m.



Ms. Cooper

Bettie Elizabeth Boyers Cooper, who helped end Richmond and Virginia's determined efforts in the 1950s to maintain racially segregated public schools, has died.

The courageous plaintiff, who won a little-remembered federal lawsuit that enabled the first Black students to enter previously all-white public schools in the city, died Saturday, Oct. 8, 2022. She was 94.



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Known affectionately as "Sister" and "Big Mama," her life was celebrated Friday, Oct. 21, at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Henrico County.

The New Jersey transplant who grew up in Richmond became fed up with segregation when her daughter, Daisy Jane, had to ride a bus four miles to and from Carver Elementary School rather than attend the whites-only Westhampton Elementary School that was within walking distance, said Ms. Cooper's granddaughter, Kelly Johnson-Crowder.

A professional seamstress, Ms. Cooper took action at a time when Massive Resistance was in full swing in Virginia to block implementation of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 and 1955 decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawing racial separation of schoolchildren.

Represented by civil rights attorneys from Hill, Tucker & Marsh, Ms. Cooper's battle began in 1958 when she applied to the state's new Pupil Placement Board to have her daughter, assigned to Westhampton.

However, the short-lived board, which reviewed 450,000 placement applications over three years, never assigned any Black students to a whites-only school.

Ms. Cooper refused to accept the decision, and her lawyers filed a federal suit seeking to overturn it. Two others who had initially been part of the case dropped out, but Ms. Cooper was adamant in ensuring the case went forward.

Her case became a slam-dunk after the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a separate case in 1960 that the placement board violated the state and federal constitutions. That led the state to allow localities to begin voluntary "freedom of choice" plans that enabled Black parents who sought to do so to send their children to previously whites-only schools.

It would take up to 11 more years before federal courts started requiring school districts to start busing white and black students to achieve integration.

Richmond, whose School Board was then led by future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, refused to implement even a voluntary placement policy until Ms. Cooper's case was decided.

That came a year later in 1961, when U.S. District Court Judge Oren R. Lewis issued an order in favor of Ms. Cooper and other Black parents. Ms. Cooper's daughter, at age 12, became the first Black student to take classes Westhampton Junior High School.

A year later, Daisy became the first Black student to attend Thomas Jefferson High School, according to an archived record at the Virginia Commonwealth University.

A graduate of Armstrong High School, Ms. Cooper sewed pants, suits and sports coats for 18 years for Jefferson Manufacturing Co., and later worked for 17 years for the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles before retiring.

A resident of the Westwood community for most of her life, Ms. Cooper became well known for her efforts on behalf of the children of the West End neighborhood. Although she never owned a car, she took children on day trips by public transportation, Ms. Crowder said.

She often opened her home to relatives, friends and sometimes strangers who needed a temporary place to stay, Ms. Crowder said.

Ms. Cooper became a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1982 and was active in proselytizing activities.

Along with her daughter, survivors include Ms. Cooper's brother, Hamp Anderson; sisters Beatrice Brown, Franceno Diggs and Lenny Thornton; four grand-daughters; eight great-grandchildren; and 14 great-great-grandchildren.



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