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## MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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### **African American Virginians to Be Included on Virginia Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument**

**Richmond, VA** - As part of its commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and abolition of slavery in the United States, the Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (“Commission”) will construct the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument on Brown’s Island. The monument, designed by Thomas Jay Warren of Oregon, will feature a 12-foot bronze statue representing newly freed slaves.

Dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the centuries-long fight for emancipation and freedom, the monument also will highlight notable African American Virginians who have made significant contributions to the emancipation and freedom of formerly enslaved persons or descendants. The base of the monument will feature the names, images, and brief biographical information about 10 African American Virginians whose lives were dedicated to emancipation and freedom—five individuals from the period before emancipation through 1865 and five who continued to work for freedom from 1866 to 1970.

Nominations for individuals to appear on the monument were received from members of the public, schools, museums, and historical organizations from September through March 2016. The Commission also held five public hearings across the Commonwealth to solicit nominations. Nearly 100 individuals were nominated. A work group consisting of legislative members, educators, historians, and community leaders and led by the Commission’s chair, Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, narrowed the list of nominees to 30 finalists. The Commission held a second series of public hearings in Blacksburg, Alexandria, Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Danville in July and August of 2017.

In reaching its decisions, the work group weighed the public comment received at the public hearings and the written comments received by the Commission. The Commission approved the work group’s recommendations at its meeting on September 20, 2017.

To represent the time period before emancipation in 1865, the Commission selected the following individuals:

- Mary Elizabeth Bowser, a spy for the Union in the Confederate White House;
- William Harvey Carney, a former slave who fought in the 54th Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry Regiment and for his actions at Fort Wagner was the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor;

- Gabriel, who led one of the half-dozen most important insurrection plots in the history of North American slavery;
- Dred Scott, an enslaved man whose unsuccessful lawsuit for his freedom led to the infamous Supreme Court decision that persons of African descent were not United States citizens; and
- Nat Turner, leader of the only successful slave revolt in Virginia's history, shattering the myth of the contented slave.

To represent the time period from 1865 to 1970, the Commission selected the following individuals:

- Rosa Dixon Bowser, an educator, women's rights activist, and social reformer who founded the first African American teachers association and co-founded the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and the National Association of Colored Women;
- John Mercer Langston, Virginia's first African American member of Congress and the first president of what is now Virginia State University;
- John Mitchell, Jr., a community activist, the first African American to run for Governor of Virginia, and editor of the *Richmond Planet* newspaper, which covered local, national, and worldwide news, especially lynchings, segregation, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan;
- Lucy Simms, a prominent educator who taught three generations of African American children in the Harrisonburg area; and
- Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, a Petersburg minister, civil rights activist, chief of staff to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Each of the more than 100 individuals nominated for inclusion on the monument will be featured on the Commission's website.

For biographical information on the individuals chosen and updates on the monument's progress, visit <http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/lincoln/monument.html>.