

# 2021 Martin Luther King Program

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

### **Opening Remarks**

- Hon. Justin M. Wilson, Mayor of Alexandria

### **Keynote Speaker**

- Hon. L. Douglas Wilder, Former Governor of Virginia

### **Performances**

- Eric Roberson, 2x GRAMMY Nominated Artist
- KaNikki Jakarta, Alexandria Poet Laureate
- Historic Alfred Street Baptist Church and Westminster Presbyterian Church Community Choir

### **Community Activists**

- Semone Byrd, Mistress of Ceremonies, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee
- Audrey P. Davis, Director of Black History Museum
- Canek Aguirre, Alexandria City Councilman
- Frank Purcell, President of Cardinal Waypoint, LLC
- Nancy Joseph, Vice President of Thursday Network, Greater Washington Urban League
- Rosa Byrd, Living Alexandria Legend, Chair of Alexandria Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee
- Natasha D. Williams, Creative Director, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee

## Biographies

### Hon. Justin M. Wilson

#### Mayor of Alexandria

As Mayor, Justin represents the City regionally on the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors. Within the City, Justin leads the City-Schools Subcommittee, the ARHA Redevelopment Committee, the Quality of Life Committee, Legislative Subcommittee, the Audit Committee, the Employee Pension/Compensation Committee, the Potomac Yard Metro Implementation Advisory Group and the Combined Sewer Outfall Project Review Team Workgroup.



An experienced community leader, Justin previously served 8 years on the City Council prior to his election as Mayor, including service from 2016 – 2019 as Alexandria’s Vice Mayor. Justin’s leadership has led to new investments in schools, transportation and environmental infrastructure. He has worked to expand early childhood education, address growing student enrollment, accelerate economic growth, advance climate policy as well as protecting and expanding housing affordability.

He holds a bachelor’s of science degree in Information Systems from Virginia Commonwealth University, and is a Fellow of the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia.

An avid runner, Justin has completed eight marathons, and he lives in the Del Ray neighborhood of Alexandria with his wife, Alex, a life-long Alexandrian, and their son, Eli and daughter Lena, both Alexandria City Public School students.

### Hon. L. Douglas Wilder

#### Former Governor of Virginia

*[A video montage](#) of highlights of the groundbreaking life of Douglas Wilder, the first African American governor of Virginia. (Courtesy Alexandria Library)*

Lawrence Douglas Wilder’s career in public service spans 40 years and is noted for several historic milestones.

Mr. Wilder became the first African-American to be elected governor in the U.S., leading the Commonwealth of Virginia from



1990 to 1994. As the Commonwealth's 66th governor, he was commended for his sound fiscal management and balancing the state budget during difficult economic times. Financial World magazine ranked Virginia as the best-managed state in the U.S. for two consecutive years under his administration.

Prior to his time as governor, he served as lieutenant governor from 1986 to 1990 and as a state senator from 1969-1985, chairing committees on Transportation; Rehabilitation and Social Services; Privileges and Elections; the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council; and the Senate Steering Committee, which appoints committee members.

Other legislative achievements include providing state health care coverage for sickle-cell anemia patients, toughening penalties for capital murderers and prison escapees, and expanding low and moderate-income housing. For eight years, he persisted in sponsoring legislation that eventually led to establishing a state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. making Virginia the first state in the nation to have a legislative holiday for Dr. King.

Persuaded to run for mayor in 2004, Mr. Wilder received eighty percent of the vote and carried each of the City's nine council districts and every precinct in the City. He was sworn in as Richmond's first elected mayor in 2005 and served until 2009, making him the first African-American mayor elected by popular vote from all of the citizens of Richmond. During his term, Richmond made remarkable progress in its fight against crime, having its lowest rate in 27 years. Downtown economic development and neighborhood improvements were widespread, and financial management reached a new level of scrutiny that served taxpayers well.

An attorney by profession, Mr. Wilder gained recognition as a leading criminal trial lawyer. He graduated from Howard University Law School in 1959 and later established the legal firm that became known as Wilder, Gregory & Associates, one of the few minority-owned businesses in Virginia at the time. Prior to earning his J.D., he graduated from Virginia Union University with a B.S. degree in Chemistry and worked in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner as a toxicology technician. At present, Mr. Wilder is a Distinguished Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs where he lectures and hosts symposia, including the most recent, "By the People: The Role of Urban Communities in Improving Housing, Education, and Public Policy". He is also the author of *Son of Virginia: A Life in America's Political Arena*, published by Lyons Press, which was recently released in paperback. In the past year, he has served as the keynote speaker for The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report National Conference held at the University of Minnesota and the University of Richmond's Law Symposium, The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act: Past, Present, and Future. Wilder continues to be a champion of people and causes. He's still a highly-involved and highly-dedicated citizen of the city that he has called home for most of his life, and one of its best and most outspoken ambassadors. A previous recipient of the NAACP's prestigious Spingarn Medal, Wilder will also serve as the Honorary Chair of the First Africans to English North America Committee for the 2019 Commemoration and is also the driving force for establishing a National Slavery Museum in Virginia.

## Eric Roberson

### 2x GRAMMY Nominated Artist

GRAMMY Award-nominee, singer, songwriter, and producer Eric Roberson continues to break boundaries as an independent artist in an industry dominated by major labels, manufactured sounds and mainstream radio. Described as the original pioneer of the independent movement in R&B/soul music, Eric has achieved major milestones in his career, from being a successful songwriter and producer for notable artist such as Jill Scott, Musiq Soulchild, Dwele, Vivian Green and countless others, as well as headlining sold out tours across the country.



This Rahway, NJ and Howard University alum became the first independent artist to be nominated for a BET Award 2007 and was the recipient of the "Underground Artist of the Year" BETJ Virtual Award, with Rahsaan Patterson in 2008. In addition, Eric was nominated in both 2010 and 2011 for a GRAMMY award in the "Best Urban/Alternative Performance" category and continues to blaze trails unheard of as an independent artist.

We are facing an unprecedented time. While challenging, it is also the perfect time to create.

Eric Roberson, the King of Independent Soul and R&B, is ready to make his mark in this moment. In 4 weeks, Roberson crafted *Hear from Here*, an impromptu, 10-song feel good album, crafted to fill the ears, minds and souls of his everlasting fanbase. This time of solitude from the world afforded Roberson the opportunity to immerse himself in his creative process and create a powerful album. Roberson describes *Hear from Here* as an "act of service" to his devoted fans.

## KaNikki Jakarta

### Alexandria Poet Laureate

KaNikki Jakarta is the First African American Poet Laureate of Alexandria, Virginia. She is an Award, Winning Performance Poet who has toured the US and the UK.

KaNikki is the author of three novels, two poetry collections, a memoir, a short story, poetry collection entitled *Alabama Girl*, *Virginia Woman* and the co-author of *The Ultimate Guide to Self*



*Healing Volume II.*

Ms. Jakarta has been interviewed and featured in newspapers and magazines to include Alexandria Times, Alexandria Gazette, Patch, and Northern Virginia Magazines. She's been featured on Podcasts, radio stations and TV stations to include WUSA9. She hosts #KaNikkiHarmony1st Mondays Open Mic Night at Busboys and Poets Virginia. She facilitates a quarterly workshop entitled: "Write Like a Woman" in Alexandria, Virginia, a virtual, monthly workshop entitled "Prep to Publish," and offers "KaNikki for Kids," a virtual ASL and Affirmation class for children ages 6 -11. She presents "Poets and Platform" under the umbrella of a weekly, online women led artistic experience entitled "Keep the Mic On" where she is the co-founder. If you think that something she says on the mic might change your life, you're probably right.

## The Historic Alfred Street Baptist Church and Westminster Presbyterian Church

### Community Choir

Celebrating with us is a Community Choir comprised of the [Historic Alfred Street Baptist Church](#) and [Westminster Presbyterian Church](#) singers. Directed by Dr. Joyce Garrett; Director, Music and Worship Arts and Dr. Ben Hutchens, Director of Music Ministries. Together with their notable choir members, Dr. Hutchens and Dr. Garrett lead the choir in a powerful rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

**Alfred Street Baptist Church Singers:** Dr. Joyce Garrett (organ), Alma Haygood, Lynda Prioleau, Cara Rhone, Alberta Forbes-Baker, Shayla Hines, John Greene, Theodore Thorpe, III, Arlene Whitlock

**Westminster Prebyterian Church Singers:** Dr. Ben Hutchens (Director/Producer) David Aland, Sieg Chencinski, Mary Alice Davidson, Nadja Duss, Pat Flagg, Rebekah Givens, Christine Hagan, Kalista Hines, Terri LaGoe, Mary Kim, Elizabeth Martineau, Melissa McClelland, Deborah Peetz, Frank Purcell, Molly Roden, Peter Roden, Jeanne Sampson, Neil Sampson, Gaia Sidahmed, Kay Sidahmed, Barbara Studenmund, Heather West, Stan West, Tara West



**Westminster**  
Presbyterian Church

## Semone Byrd

**Mistress of Ceremonies**

**Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee**

Semone Byrd is an active member of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Planning Committee, serving as the Committee Secretary since 2013 and performing as the Mistress of Ceremonies.

Since moving to Alexandria with her native Alexandrian husband of 30 years, Julious, she began her volunteer journey in the City of Alexandria serving several terms as Cora Kelly's PTA President and working various Voter Drives. Semone has served as a City of Alexandria Election Official for 20+ years. When she's not actively advocating for voting rights, Semone coaches youth basketball, serves as a TC Williams Booster, and is a member of the Northern Virginia Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Inc. Out of all of her achievements, Semone is the proudest of the role of mother to her two young adult sons, Jordan and Jalen.



## Audrey P. Davis

**Director of the Alexandria Black History Museum**

Audrey P. Davis is Director of the Alexandria Black History Museum in Alexandria, Virginia.

Ms. Davis is a past President of the Virginia Association of Museums (VAM) and is one of the founders and the Director of *Virginia Africana Associates Inc.: The Network of Museum, History and Preservation Professionals*. Ms. Davis is currently Vice President of the Alexandria Historical Society, a board member for Living Legends of Alexandria, Preservation Virginia and for the National Women's History Museum. In 2016, *The Washington Business Journal* listed Ms. Davis as number two on their top 100 list of Washington Power Players.



On January 5, 2018, Ms. Davis was appointed by Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe to the *Task Force for the Identification of the History of Formerly Enslaved African Americans in Virginia*. On November 30, 2018, Ms. Davis was reappointed by Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam to

the State Historical Records Advisory Board, for a term of three years beginning November 1, 2018 and ending October 31, 2021. It is her fifth gubernatorial appointment.

Ms. Davis is featured on the WETA Documentaries, *Discovering Alexandria parts I and II*, and *Martyrs, Mayhem and Martial Law: Life in Civil War Alexandria*. She is also featured in the upcoming documentary *Our Alexandria* by filmmaker Robin Hamilton, which looks at Alexandria Civil Rights through the lens of two local African American dollhouse creators. She was also an on-set historical consultant for the PBS drama *Mercy Street*, which premiered nationally in January 2016 and ran for two seasons.

## Canek Aguirre

### Alexandria City Councilman

Canek Aguirre was elected on November 6, 2018, to serve a three-year term on City Council from 2019 through 2021. He is the first Latino elected to City Council. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Canek is the son of Mexican immigrants who instilled in him the importance of hard work, education, and giving back to the community. He is committed to increasing housing opportunities throughout the city, investing in our public schools and infrastructure, eliminating health inequities to improve health outcomes, and ensuring the voices and concerns of all residents are at the table during the decision-making process.



Prior to his election to City Council, Canek served in leadership roles on numerous boards and commissions. He is a past Chair of the Economic Opportunities Commission, past President of the Tenants and Workers United (TWU) Board of Directors, and past Vice Chairman of the Health Systems Agency of Northern Virginia (HSANV) Board of Directors. He also served on the Leadership Council for the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP) and the Steering Committee for the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria (PHA). In 2016, Canek was appointed to the Virginia Board of Social Work by Governor Terry McAuliffe.

As a community advocate, he has fought to increase affordable housing in the city, improve equity in our schools, and built coalitions to promote government transparency and accountability.

Canek has a track record of bringing people together to improve the lives of Alexandrians. In his professional capacity, he works with underserved communities throughout Northern Virginia to increase access to care and improve health outcomes. Canek received a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## Frank Purcell

### **President of Cardinal Waypoint, LLC**

Frank Purcell is president of Cardinal Waypoint LLC, a consultancy for health policy, advocacy and leadership, based in Alexandria. He and his wife Christine Purcell live in Arlandria where he serves as president of the Lenox Place at Sunnyside Homeowners Association Board of Directors, works as an election official at Cora Kelly - Chick Armstrong Precinct, sings with the Westminster Presbyterian Church Choir and is immediate past president of its Choir Council.



Frank also volunteers with the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. A member of the American Society of Association Executives, the Community Association Institute, the Council for Affordable Health Coverage, US Masters Swimming and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, Frank is a bachelors graduate with high honors from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, undertook MBA coursework at Johns Hopkins University, and completed the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education Program on Health Care Delivery Systems Policy. Before the pandemic he occasionally read his own work at the Del Ray Players Performing Arts poetry nights at St. Elmo's Coffee Pub in Del Ray.

## Nancy Joseph

### **Vice President of Thursday Network, Greater Washington Urban League**

A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Nancy Joseph is the Vice President of Thursday Network, the young professional's auxiliary of the Greater Washington Urban League.

Nancy has been a longtime dedicated community servant; she is passionate about doing her part and being the change she wishes to see in her community. Nancy has been a committed Urban Leaguer for over 10 years. She previously served as a Public Relations Chair within the Boston and the D.C. chapters of the Urban League Young Professionals auxiliaries. She has also volunteered in various capacities for NAACP Boston, Haiti Renewal Alliance (DC), and the YMCA youth. Nancy is also a proud member of the illustrious Northern Virginia Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated where she currently serves on the Social Action Committee.





Nancy's true passion lies in motivating others to be the best versions of themselves. As an Empowerment Coach, certified by the International Coaching Federation (ICF), Nancy finds joy in helping others facilitate their own discovery. She truly believes change begins with self and can ultimately build and shape communities for the better.

## Rosa Byrd

### **Alexandria Living Legend**

### **Chair of Alexandria Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee**

Rosa Byrd is a Living Legend of Alexandria. Rosa Byrd and her husband Jack have lived in Alexandria for more than 50 years and for much of that time she has been a community leader and champion for causes to make her Lynhaven neighborhood a safe place to live. They are the proud parents of Patricia Yancey (Alex) and Julious Byrd (Semone) and grandparents of Chanel Yancey, Jordan Byrd and Jalen Byrd.



For more than 35 years, Byrd and her friends inspected alleyways of Lynhaven for code enforcement violations, sanitation problems and lighting outages. Byrd developed a working relationship with the Mayor, members of City Council and the City Manager that helped to solve many of the neighborhood's problems. She and her neighbors were successful in transforming a vacant lot into a playground for their children. One former business owner was so appreciative of Byrd's volunteer efforts in her community that he established the Lynhaven/Byrd scholarship at T.C. Williams High School. Del Pepper, Alexandria City Council Member, stated, "In many ways, large and small, Rosa has truly made a positive difference in the neighborhood and community. She has shown courage when that was needed as well as determination, commitment and perseverance. It's caring people like Rosa that have made Alexandria such a wonderful place to live."

Rosa has passionately fought for the civil rights of the citizens in Alexandria and beyond. Rosa has served on the city's Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee for years under the tutelage of Mabel T. Lyles. Rosa graciously assumed the position of Chair in 2016 and works extensively with the other twenty-five committee members planning the Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program throughout the year.

Rosa has been recognized consistently for her commitment to service. In 1991, The Alexandria Commission on the Status of Women awarded Rosa with the "Woman to Woman" award. In 2008, she received the DPC Black History 2008 Champion of Equality & Justice Award, in 2013 she was named a Living Legend of Alexandria, in 2015 the Departmental Progressive Club Inc.

honored Rosa with the Community Service Award and in 2020, Rosa was awarded Rev. Benjamin A. Lynt Distinguish Service Award. This year will mark the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial program's 48<sup>th</sup> year, and Rosa is proud not only to lead the Committee, but to witness all that its accomplished.

## Natasha D. Williams

### **Creative Director, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee**

Natasha D. Williams is the newest member of the citizen led, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee. Natasha has volunteered with the Committee since 2019 and in January 2020 served as the Mistress of Ceremonies for the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program. This year, Natasha is proud to serve as Creative Director for the programs first virtual and televised commemoration.

A heart for service, Natasha volunteers with the elderly at the Annie B. Rose Assisted Living Community; is a member of the Community Service committee with the Northern Virginia Alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated; led a 2020 breast cancer awareness campaign, providing undergarments to women and adolescent girls for the Koinonia Foundation and sings with the Psalms of Praise choir as part of the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church.

Natasha is very passionate about planning events, particularly conceptualizing the vision and design from start to finish. Natasha has lent her expertise to political public meetings, weddings, personal brand launches and commemorative programs. When she isn't serving her community, you can find her mentoring professionals and entrepreneurs on their personal brand, style and transformation. In her free time, Natasha loves spending time with her family, sorority sisters, and godchildren.

