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RECOGNIZING THE AWARD RECIPIENTS OF THE 2023 CENTREVILLE IMMIGRATION FORUM ANNUAL DINNER

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY
OF VIRGINIA

MR. CONNOLLY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the Centreville Immigration Forum on the occasion of its 6th Annual Dinner. The theme of this year's gala is "*Celebrating a Community United for Justice*" and will recognize the rich diversity of cultures in Northern Virginia. The Centreville Immigration Forum has done tremendous work in Northern Virginia to support our immigrant community by implementing sustainable programs that provide immigrants in need with the means to improve their lives and become more integrated into the community.

Northern Virginia is blessed by its diversity. In Fairfax County, nearly 1 in 4 residents is foreign born. More than 200 languages are spoken in our schools, and we are home to more minority-owned technology firms than anywhere else in the nation. Our variety of cultures and heritages do not divide us; they make us stronger.

Three exceptional individuals will be honored during this gala who have gone above and beyond in ensuring that everyone, regardless of their country of origin, has full access to the benefits and opportunities this community and our nation provide. I am pleased to enter the names of the following 2023 Annual Dinner honorees into the Congressional Record:

Ms. Annabel Park: Annabel Park is a Korean American documentary filmmaker, political activist and community volunteer. She shined light on the struggles of immigrants in America through her documentary *9500 Liberty* which was an interactive project, allowing viewers to comment and give direction to the production. It highlighted the struggles in Manassas and Prince William County 2008-2009, when some leaders passed laws to make life difficult for immigrants. The story of building community in the face of bigotry inspired Centreville to organize in the years

following. Ms. Park went on to co-produce the *Story of America* documentary series about voting rights across the country.

Mr. Hassan Ahmad: Hassan Ahmad is the principal and founder of HMA Law Firm. He is fluent or proficient in eight languages in addition to English, and this gives his clients comfort when telling their stories. His perspective on immigration as a means to prosperity is borne from his belief in unity in diversity, advising nationals of 117 countries around the world for nearly 20 years. He is a strong voice for justice and writes and speaks fearlessly against laws and policies that limit the lives of immigrants. He is an expert on the roots of anti-immigration organizations. About one-third of his practice is devoted to asylum cases.

Ms. Monica Sarmiento: Monica Sarmiento is the Executive Director for the Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights (VACIR), an organization dedicated to the defense of dignity, power, and quality of life for all immigrant and refugee communities. She is from the DC metropolitan area and is Salvadoran-American. She was the founding Executive Director of VACIR and built it into a coalition of immigrant rights groups with a respected voice in the Virginia General Assembly. She organized lobby days, press conferences, and campaigns that led to Driver Privilege Cards, increased language access to public information, and in-state tuition for all high school graduates.

Mr. Speaker, the efforts of these individuals are noteworthy not only because they are rooted in an appreciation for our region's cultural and ethnic diversity, but also because they help to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation in our community. I congratulate them on their awards and ask my colleagues to join me in commending them for their service to the Northern Virginia region.