

108TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 223

Recognizing the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and supporting the designation of an Equal Justice Day in commemoration of such anniversary.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 19, 2003

Mr. CONYERS (for himself, Ms. LOFGREN, Mr. DELAHUNT, Mr. FROST, Mr. McDERMOTT, Ms. LEE, Mr. WYNN, Ms. MCCARTHY of Missouri, and Mr. CASE) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Recognizing the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and supporting the designation of an Equal Justice Day in commemoration of such anniversary.

Whereas on June 21, 1963, President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy convened 244 members of the National, State, and local private bar to provide legal representation to remedy racial discrimination against minority communities;

Whereas, without President Kennedy's vision for racial justice, the bar would have remained silent in the face of vocal resistance by Southern State legislatures against desegregation;

Whereas for more than 4 decades, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (hereinafter in this resolution referred to as "Lawyers' Committee") has worked to advance the civil rights of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minority communities in the areas of environmental protection, employment, affirmative action, fair housing, education, and voting;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee operated an office in Jackson, Mississippi, from 1964 through 1984, which filed numerous cases that transformed the State, including the defense of civil rights demonstrators, desegregation of many public institutions and workforces, reformation of the notorious Parchman Prison, and numerous voting rights cases resulting in a revolution in the number of African-American elected officials in State positions and Congress;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee fought for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the 1982 Amendments, Fair Housing Act of 1988, Civil Rights Act of 1991, and National Voter Registration Act of 1993;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee secured a landmark, unanimous United States Supreme Court decision that strengthened first amendment protections for peaceful political boycotts in *Claiborne Hardware Co. v. NAACP*;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee created a police community relations program in 1965 that recruited African-Americans for law enforcement positions and eased tensions between law enforcement officers and African-American communities;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee defended the students of Jackson State University following police shootings upon a peaceful demonstration that killed 2 persons and wounded a dozen others;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee operated its Cairo, Illinois office from 1969 through 1972 in response to intense racial unrest and police brutality in the city;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee recruited attorneys from the local bar to represent African-Americans who could not obtain legal counsel during the 1960s;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee transformed African-American voting strength by litigating critical cases throughout the South to oppose archaic voter discrimination laws, poll taxes, and literacy tests that prevented African-Americans from registering and voting;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee launched the Urban Areas Project in 1968, which resulted in local independent Lawyers' Committee offices in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Denver, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C.;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee developed the Southern African Project, which provided legal assistance to thousands of political detainees and technical assistance in resisting pro-apartheid legislation for more than 20 years and which monitored elections in Namibia in 1989 and elections in South Africa in 1994;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee led the defense of Executive Order 11246 when it was attacked during the Reagan Administration in the 1980s;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee litigated a series of cases from the 1970s to the present that desegregated police

and fire departments throughout the Nation, notably in the State of Mississippi and in Miami, Birmingham, Cleveland, Nassau County, Buffalo, and Houston;

Whereas in *Givens v. Hamlet Estates*, the Lawyers' Committee acquired the first seizure order in a fair housing case that led to the exposure of a decade old racial coding system that denied apartments to 6,000 African-Americans and Hispanics in Miami, Florida;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee obtained victories in 3 cases before the United States Supreme Court in 1996–1997 involving the Voting Rights Act, including *Young v. Fordice*, *Lawyer v. United States*, and *King v. State Board of Elections*;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee persuaded the Environmental Protection Agency to relocate 358 African-American families living around the Escambia toxic Superfund site in Pensacola, Florida;

Whereas in *NAACP v. Harris*, the Lawyers' Committee reached a settlement agreement with the State of Florida following the 2000 elections to improve its administration procedures in allowing its minority citizens to vote;

Whereas the Lawyers' Committee coordinated a Church Burning Project in the 1990s to provide free legal assistance to churches that were destroyed during a bitter rampage of racially motivated church burnings;

Whereas in *Washington Park Land Committee v. Portsmouth*, the Lawyers' Committee secured a case settlement that led to the relocation of 185 families from toxic lead poisoned segregated public housing in Portsmouth, Virginia, to new integrated housing opportunities; and

Whereas June 21, 2003 is the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Lawyers' Committee: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring)*, That Congress—

3 (1) recognizes that these accomplishments of
4 the Lawyers' Committee reflect the tremendous com-
5 mitment to implementing justice that President
6 Kennedy embarked on 40 years ago;

7 (2) recognizes the achievements of the Lawyers'
8 Committee, as its staff and pro bono attorneys, cli-
9 ents, and friends commemorate and celebrate its
10 40th anniversary; and

11 (3) supports the designation of an appropriate
12 day as "Equal Justice Day" in honor of the dedi-
13 cated work of the Lawyers' Committee and the
14 many hours of pro bono service offered by lawyers
15 and law firms throughout this country to secure jus-
16 tice and equal opportunity for all.

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