



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

RESOLUTION NO. 250619

Introduced June 5, 2025

RESOLUTION

Calling on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass SB 71 renaming the Pennsylvania Judicial Center the “Chief Justice Robert N.C. Nix, Jr. Judicial Center”

WHEREAS, Robert Nelson Cornelius Nix, Jr. was born July 13, 1928 in Philadelphia. He was the son of Robert N.C. Nix, Pennsylvania’s first African American member of the U.S. Congress; and

WHEREAS, Nix graduated from Central High School in 1946 with high honors, and later valedictorian from Villanova University in 1950. He received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania three years later; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from law school, Nix spent 2 years serving in the United States Army before becoming a Deputy Attorney General in 1956; and

WHEREAS, After two years in the Attorney General's Office he joined his father’s law firm, Nix, Rhodes and Nix, as a partner, where he gained a reputation as a civil rights advocate. He represented United Neighbors, a citizens’ group advocating improvements in a blighted section of West Philadelphia, and served as a member of the mayor's advisory committee on civil rights in 1963, where he raised questions about racial discrimination in city government hiring, and pushed for action against slumlords; and

WHEREAS, A ward leader, in 1967 Nix was elected as a judge on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. He was appointed an associate justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court by Governor Milton Shapp in 1971, and was elected the following year, the first African American elected to statewide office in Pennsylvania history; and

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RESOLUTION NO. 250619 continued

WHEREAS, Nix became Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1984, the first African American state court Chief Justice in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Nix developed a reputation as a voice for individual rights. A champion of the broader rights accorded by the state constitution, Justice Nix led the court to interpret the Pennsylvania Constitution to ensure more individual rights than the U.S. Constitution, especially in the areas of search and seizure and sovereign immunity; and

WHEREAS, He was also an early voice against prosecutors using their power to exclude African Americans from juries, though his liberal jurisprudence did not stop him from being the lone voice for upholding Pennsylvania's death penalty statute in 1977; and

WHEREAS, During his time on the Supreme Court, Nix was honored with 12 honorary doctorates and membership on the board of trustees of the American Inns of Court and many universities, and from 1991 to 1992 he served as President of the National Conference of Chief Justices. Pope John Paul II inducted Nix as a Commander Knight in the Order of St. Gregory the Great; and

WHEREAS, In 1996 Chief Justice Nix announced his retirement from the bench, and on August 23, 2003, Nix died after suffering from Alzheimer's disease, leaving behind an iconic legacy for Philadelphia lawyers and judges; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass SB 71 renaming the Pennsylvania Judicial Center the "Chief Justice Robert N.C. Nix, Jr. Judicial Center"