

Legislation Text

File #: 180088, **Version:** 0

Recognizing a Moment of Silence on February 1, 2018 in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the sacrifices made by Memphis sanitation workers who proclaimed “I Am a Man” in their successful campaign to secure their economic rights and social dignity.

WHEREAS, 2018 marks the 50th Anniversary of both the Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis, Tennessee - when they were compelled to remind the public that they were indeed human - and the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., while there supporting the Sanitation Workers Strike; and

WHEREAS, According to the 2007 book by Michael Honey, *A Plantation in the City*, regarding this period: “The mix of segregation, low wages, anti-union sentiment, and machine politics in Memphis created a particularly deadly legacy for public sector employees”; and

WHEREAS, On February 1, 1968, two Memphis garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck - a deadly result of the lack of proper maintenance Memphis workers had been organizing to rectify; and

WHEREAS, On February 11th, over 700 workers attended a union meeting and unanimously voted to strike; and

WHEREAS, The following day, 1,300 black workers from the Memphis Department of Public Works went on strike, demanding recognition of their union, better safety standards, and a decent wage; and

WHEREAS, On February 24th, 150 local ministers formed Community on the Move for Equality (“COME”), under the leadership of minister James Lawson, which was committed to the use of nonviolent civil disobedience to fill Memphis’s jails and bring attention to the plight of the sanitation workers; and

WHEREAS, By the beginning of March, local high school and college students, nearly a quarter of them white, were participating alongside garbage workers in daily marches; and over one hundred people, including several ministers, had been arrested; and

WHEREAS, In continuation of his ongoing efforts striving for economic, as well as racial justice, on March 18th, Dr. King addressed a crowd of about 25,000, the largest indoor gathering the civil rights movement had ever seen, saying, “You are demonstrating that we can stick together. You are demonstrating that we are all tied in a single garment of destiny, and that if one black person suffers, if one black person is down, we are all down”; and

WHEREAS, On March 29th, more than 200 striking workers continued their daily march, carrying signs that read, “I Am a Man;” and

WHEREAS, On April 3rd, Dr. King preached at Mason Temple, saying “Like anybody, I would like to live a long life--longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now... I've seen the Promised Land. I may

not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land”; and

WHEREAS, The next day, as King was getting ready for dinner, he was shot and killed on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, spurring an estimated 42,000 people led by Coretta Scott King, SCLC, and union leaders to silently march through Memphis in his honor four days later, demanding that the city accede to the union’s requests; and

WHEREAS, Negotiators finally reached a deal on April 16th, allowing the City Council to recognize the union and guaranteeing a better wage; and

WHEREAS, The struggle for racial equity continues to be intertwined with the struggle for fair wages, strong safety protections, and empowered workers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That this Council does recognize a Moment of Silence on February 1, 2018 in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the sacrifices made by Memphis sanitation workers who proclaimed “I Am a Man” in their successful campaign to secure their economic rights and social dignity.