

Legislation Text

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Honoring and Congratulating Commonwealth Court Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner on Receiving the Thaddeus Stevens Award Recognizing her Work to Provide Equal Educational Opportunity to All Students in the School District of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner was elected to the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania in 1987 after having served on the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, Juvenile Division; and

WHEREAS, In 1993, Judge Smith-Ribner was assigned the landmark school desegregation case that had begun 23 years earlier in 1970, Pennsylvania Human Relations v. School District of Philadelphia, which sought equal educational opportunity for African-American and Hispanic students attending racially isolated public schools in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, For years following the initiation of the law suit, the School District relied almost exclusively on bussing to address the lack of educational opportunity in the City's racially isolated schools; and

WHEREAS, After deciding that the School District failed to provide an equal educational opportunity for all students in the District, the Judge issued a Remedial Order in 1994 that focused on improving educational opportunities for the more than 100,000 students who remained in the racially isolated schools, rather than relying on the traditional desegregation strategy of busing: "We have to provide a quality education to all of our children if they are to succeed," she explained; and

WHEREAS, The Remedial Order required the School District to undertake actions to remedy the historical discrimination found to exist against African-American and Hispanic students and to provide them with equal educational opportunities including: requiring the District, among other things, to provide full-day kindergarten as of September 1995; a standardized curriculum with up-to-date textbooks; modernization of facilities for racially isolated schools; reduced dropout rates for high school students; and accommodation rooms within school facilities to allow students with disciplinary issues to serve any suspension without missing time from school; and

WHEREAS, Over the next 15 years, through appeals, re-argument and then various court conferences and hearings to enforce and monitor the School District's compliance with the 1994 Remedial Order, Judge Smith-Ribner remained committed to a resolution that targeted resources based on factors including rates of poverty, student performance and the number of English language learners; and

WHEREAS, In 2009 Judge Smith-Ribner forged a final consent agreement among the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, the School District and Intervenor Aspira bringing an end to the case, along with additional funding for the School District and a more equitable school funding formula; and

WHEREAS, She is recognized as the education heroine of the twenty-first century and the modern-day Thurgood Marshall; and

WHEREAS, Judge Smith-Ribner's perseverance, oversight and final resolution of the case and its resulting

impact on the quality of educational opportunity in racially isolated schools was recognized by her being awarded the Thaddeus Stevens Award by the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia on September 30, 2010; and

WHEREAS, Judge Smith-Ribner's contribution and commitment have resulted in improved educational opportunity in all of the School District's schools and are worthy of this Council's recognition and appreciation; now, therefore, be it,

RESOLVED, That the Philadelphia City Council Hereby Honors and Congratulates Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner upon Receiving the Thaddeus Stevens Award Recognizing her Work to Provide Equal Educational Opportunity to All Students in the School District of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented as a sincere expression of this Council's appreciation and acknowledgement.