

Legislation Text

File #: 240595, **Version:** 0

Also naming N. College Avenue between W. College Avenue and Ridge Avenue as “Freedom Fighters Way.”

WHEREAS, Girard College was founded in 1833 as an independent boarding school for “poor, white, male orphans” and remained so segregated for over a century; and

WHEREAS, The fight to open Girard College to students of all races was one of the key northern civil rights battles of the 1960s, beginning in the nineteenth century but peaking in 1965 when the “Philadelphia Freedom Fighters” took direct action to desegregate the school; and

WHEREAS, Pioneering civil rights leader Cecil B. Moore led the effort to integrate Girard College, and the Freedom Fighters answered his call by protesting outside the school’s walls every day from May 1st to December 17th, seven months and seventeen days total; and

WHEREAS, These protests were met with police resistance, with 1,000 police officers lining the walls of the College at the direction of Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo to bar the entry of the Freedom Fighters, arresting protestors attempting to scale the walls of Girard College; and

WHEREAS, Days into the protest, the police turned to repressive tactics including foot and motor charges into the crowds, firing gas canisters and running over protestors with horses; and

WHEREAS, On August 2, 1965, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the protests at the front gates of Girard College, likening the walls surrounding Girard College to “a kind of Berlin wall to keep the colored children of God out” right in the heart of the Black community in the nation’s “cradle of liberty,” Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, These protests led to a lawsuit that would integrate Girard College at the Supreme Court’s direction in 1968, the first Black students matriculating in September of that year; and

WHEREAS, The Freedom Fighters were inspired by the fight against racial injustice in the South, where some had even been born, and when the opportunity arose in Philadelphia, they picketed and sang freedom songs long into the night after spending the day in school; and

WHEREAS, Originally known as the “Youth Militants,” many Freedom Fighters would don the moniker “Freedom” as nicknames that would last throughout their lifetimes fighting for freedom and justice for communities of color in Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That N. College Avenue between W. College Avenue and Ridge Avenue shall also be named as “Freedom Fighters Way.”

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to Girard College as evidence of the true and sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.

