

Legislation Text

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Honoring the legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the 50th Anniversary of his death.

WHEREAS, Five decades after his assassination, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's words and actions resonate as a continuous reminder to "live out the true meaning of the creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal," and his legacy is a mighty monument in the annals of our history; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King developed close ties to Philadelphia while he attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, from 1948-1951. While there, he began to develop his philosophy of nonviolent protest as a means of social change, inspired by the example of Mohandas Gandhi. He also demonstrated his budding excellence as an intellectual and leader, serving as class president and valedictorian. While at Crozer, he met his mentor Reverend J. Pius Barbour at Calvary Baptist Church. During this time, he also audited classes at the University of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, At 26 years old, Dr. King officially began his career as an activist when he led the historic Montgomery bus boycott, which was initiated in 1955 and led to the successful integration of the city's public busses; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King founded and led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, an organization that spearheaded nonviolent protests against the injustices of segregated America. Additionally, SCLC trained community members in nonviolent civil resistance tactics in order to give voice and support to those most affected by segregationist policies; and

WHEREAS, Under King's leadership in early 1963, the SCLC initiated the Birmingham Campaign which focused on desegregating public and private facilities. Participants engaged in lunch counter sit-ins, marches, and boycotts. The non-violent actions were met with high-pressure fire hoses, police dogs, and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. President John F. Kennedy acknowledged it as the turning point in the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, During the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963, which was the largest-ever protest in the nation's capital at the time, Dr. King gave his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech. This speech remains one of the most recognized and celebrated of his oratorical presentations; and

WHEREAS, The non-violent approach that SCLC adopted, and the historic civil rights gains that resulted from Dr. King's advocacy, led to his selection for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964; and

WHEREAS, On March 7, 1965, Dr. King led a 600-member group of demonstrators on a march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama to demonstrate support for the rights of Black voters and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The brutality of Alabama state troopers on Edmund Pettis Bridge forced the activists to turn back. After a second attempt was forced back, the demonstrators -- having grown to 2,000 members strong-- completed the four-day journey on March 25, 1965; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King's work was instrumental in the development and adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The passage of these bills were watershed moments in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King spoke out against injustice in many forms, including not only racial discrimination but also causes such as the Vietnam War and poverty; and

WHEREAS, In August of 1965, Dr. King stopped in Philadelphia during his "Freedom Now" tour, giving speeches throughout the City. On August 2nd, he joined civil rights activists in their 13 week of protests, led by Cecil B. Moore, against the Girard College's racially discriminatory admissions policies. The next day, Dr. King addressed nearly 10,000 Philadelphians gathered at 39th Street and Lancaster Avenue. Local artist Cliff Eubanks later memorialized this address with a mural on the 4000 block of Lancaster Avenue; and

WHEREAS, On October 26, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at Barratt Junior High School in South Philadelphia before opening a concert at the Spectrum hosted by the Southern Christian Leadership Foundation. He inspired students, encouraging them to have pride in themselves, their work, and their education. "Our slogan must not be 'burn, baby, burn'. It must be 'build, baby, build.' 'Organize, baby, organize,'" he said; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King continually put his body on the line in the fight for civil rights. He was jailed 29 times, stabbed in the chest in 1958, and received innumerable death threats over the course of his life for his peaceful protests and activism. King penned his famous "A Letter from Birmingham Jail" in solitary confinement, after being arrested leading a march in Birmingham in April, 1963; and

WHEREAS, King tirelessly pursued the rights of African Americans and all victims of injustice until his assassination on April 4, 1968, at 39 years old. Today and always, Philadelphia must strive for the type of society that Dr. King fought for: one based on mutual respect and universal human dignity; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby honors the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the 50th Anniversary of his death.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation to the heirs of Dr. King and his legacy.