



Legislation Text

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Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the release of the Kerner Commission's final report, entitled the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.

WHEREAS, In the early hours of July 23, 1967, riots broke out in the city of Detroit, Michigan. The riots began when Detroit police officers raided an unlicensed weekend drinking club and decided to arrest all 82 people inside; and

WHEREAS, Over a period of 5 days, 33 African Americans and 10 Caucasians died as a result of the rioting. One of the most famous, and tragic, deaths was that of 4 year-old Tanya Blanding. She died due to gunfire from a National Guard tank stationed in front of her house; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the 43 deaths, 1,189 people were injured. Over 7,200 people were arrested, including 6,528 adults and 703 juveniles; the youngest was 4 and the oldest was 82. Additionally, more than 2,000 buildings were destroyed; and

WHEREAS, The Detroit riot was just one of 159 race riots that erupted across the United States during the "long, hot summer of 1967"; and

WHEREAS, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed an 11-member National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders on July 28, 1967, while rioting in Detroit was still underway. In his remarks upon signing the order establishing the Commission, Johnson asked for answers to three basic questions about the riots: "What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?"; and

WHEREAS, The Commission was chaired by Otto Kerner, Jr., the Governor of Illinois, and its members included the Mayor of New York, two Senators, two Congressmen, the Founder of defense contractor Litton Industries, the Executive Director of the NAACP, the President of US Steelworkers of America, the Police Chief from Atlanta, Kentucky's Commissioner of Commerce, and a lawyer who was the founder of Americans for Democratic Action; and

WHEREAS, The Commission became known as the "Kerner Commission," after its Chairman, and its final report, the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, was released on February 29, 1968, after seven months of investigation; and

WHEREAS, The report became an instant bestseller, and over two million Americans bought copies of the 426-page document. Its finding was that the riots resulted from black frustration at lack of economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, The report's most famous passage warned, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white-separate and unequal." It berated federal and state governments for failed housing, education, and social service policies; and

WHEREAS, The report also severely criticized the mainstream media, saying “The press has too long basked in a white world looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and white perspective”; and

WHEREAS, The report suggested that one main cause of urban violence was white racism and suggested that white America bore much of the responsibility for black rioting and rebellion. It called for the creation of new jobs and new housing, and for an end to de facto segregation; and

WHEREAS, The report recommended policies to address white flight and the concentration of African Americans in metropolitan areas and the need for employment opportunities for African Americans, among other things; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther King, Jr. pronounced the report a “physician's warning of approaching death, with a prescription for life”; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, President Johnson ignored the report and rejected the Kerner Commission's recommendations. In April 1968, one month after the release of the Kerner Report, rioting broke out in more than 100 cities following the assassination of Dr. King; and

WHEREAS, To mark the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Kerner Report, the Eisenhower Foundation sponsored two complementary reports, *The Millennium Breach* and *Locked in the Poorhouse*. *The Millennium Breach* found that most of the decade that followed the Kerner Report, America made progress on the principal fronts the report dealt with: race, poverty, and inner cities. Then progress stopped and in some ways reversed by a series of economic shocks and trends and the government’s action and inaction; and

WHEREAS, *The Millennium Breach* was co-authored by a former Kerner Commission member, Senator Fred Harris from Oklahoma, who said “Today, thirty years after the Kerner Report, there is more poverty in America, it is deeper, blacker, and browner than before, and it is more concentrated in the cities, which have become America’s poorhouses”; and

WHEREAS, To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Kerner Report this year, the Eisenhower Foundation is publishing *Healing Our Divided Society*. The book is edited by Senator Fred Harris, now the last surviving member of the Kerner Commission, and the Eisenhower Foundation CEO Alan Curtis; and

WHEREAS, The book states that “Today, America’s communities are experiencing increasing racial tensions and inequality, working-class resentment over the unfulfilled American Dream, white supremacy violence, toxic inaction in Washington, and the decline of the nation’s example around the world”; and

WHEREAS, Importantly, this new book sets forth evidence-based policies concerning employment, education, housing, neighborhood development, and criminal justice based on what has been proven to work-and not work; and

WHEREAS, Between February 27, 2018 and March 1, 2018, there are also a series of Kerner Commission-related conferences happening around the country, ranging from Baltimore and Washington DC to Berkeley, California. The purpose of these conferences is to not only look back at the past half-century, but also look forward to develop a roadmap for a policy agenda that can grapple with the ongoing challenges of racial inequality in American society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby commemorates the

50th Anniversary of the release of the Kerner Commission's final report, entitled the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.