City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

File #: 180318, **Version:** 0

Recognizing and honoring the life and legacy of Linda Brown, symbol of the landmark desegregation case.

WHEREAS, Linda Brown was born on February 20, 1943, in Topeka, Kansas to Leola and Oliver Brown; and

WHEREAS, When Linda was a third grader, she had to walk six blocks to her school bus stop to ride to Monroe Elementary, her segregated black school, one mile away, while Sumner Elementary, a white school, was just seven blocks from her house; and

WHEREAS, Linda's family lived in an integrated neighborhood, and she and her sister attended a black school with which her parents were satisfied. However, Linda's father Oliver was dissatisfied with the distance Linda had to travel to get to school; and

WHEREAS, Linda said, "When I first started the walk it was very frightening to me. And then when wintertime came, it was a very cold walk. I remember that. I remember walking, tears freezing up on my face, because I began to cry": and

WHEREAS, The NAACP recruited several parents, including Oliver Brown, to attempt to enroll their children in the nearest neighborhood school. When Linda was 9 years old, in 1951, her father took her to Sumner Elementary and tried to enroll her; they were denied; and

WHEREAS, In 1951, a class action suit was filed against the Board of Education of the City of Topeka, Kansas in the United States District Court for the District of Kansas. The plaintiffs were thirteen Topeka parents on behalf of their 20 children; and

WHEREAS, The case "Oliver Brown et al. v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas" was named after Oliver Brown as a legal strategy to have a man at the head of the roster. The lawyers, and the National Chapter of the NAACP, also felt that having Mr. Brown at the head of the roster would be better received by the U.S. Supreme Court Justices, should they have to appeal the District Court decision. The 13 plaintiffs were: Oliver Brown, Darlene Brown, Lena Carper, Sadie Emmanuel, Marguerite Emerson, Shirley Fleming, Zelma Henderson, Shirley Hodison, Maude Lawton, Alma Lewis, Iona Richardson, and Lucinda Todd; and

WHEREAS, The District Court ruled in favor of the Board of Education, citing the U.S. Supreme Court precedent set in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which had upheld a state law requiring "separate but equal" segregated facilities for blacks and whites in railway cars; and

WHEREAS, The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* as heard before the Supreme Court actually combined five NAACP-sponsored cases: *Brown* itself, *Briggs v. Elliott* (filed in South Carolina), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (filed in Virginia), *Gebhart v. Belto*n (filed in Delaware), and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (filed in Washington D.C.); and

WHEREAS, The NAACP's chief counsel, Thurgood Marshall-who was later appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967-argued the case before the Supreme Court for the plaintiffs; and

WHEREAS, Despite a variety of opinions, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled on May 17, 1954, that school segregation violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. “To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race,” the Court said, “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone”; and

WHEREAS, By the time of the ruling, Linda was attending an integrated junior high school. Despite also attending an integrated high school, her struggles against racial injustice did not end; and

WHEREAS, Linda was part of a group of Topeka parents who, in 1979, joined with the American Civil Liberties Union to successfully argue for the reopening of the *Brown* case. The parents argued that because of housing patterns in Topeka, racially segregated schools remained in the city, in violation of the 1954 ruling. At the time, she said, “We feel disheartened that 40 years later we’re still talking about desegregation. But the struggle has to continue”; and

WHEREAS, Due to the parents’ action, the district adopted a desegregation plan that closed eight elementary schools and opened several new elementary and magnet schools; and

WHEREAS, Linda later became an educational consultant and public speaker. She worked as a teacher with the Head Start early childhood program and was a program associate at the Brown Foundation; and

WHEREAS, Linda passed away on March 25, 2018 at age 75. She left behind a sister, Cheryl Brown Henderson and daughter, Kimberly Smith; and

WHEREAS, As Kansas Governor Jeff Colyer said, “Linda Brown's life reminds us that sometimes the most unlikely people can have an incredible impact and that by serving our community we can truly change the world"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That is hereby recognizes and honors the life and legacy of Linda Brown, symbol of the landmark desegregation case.

powered by Legistar™