

## Legislation Text

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Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Shirley Chisholm's Election as the First African-American Congresswoman in the United States of America.

WHEREAS, Shirley Chisholm was a woman of many firsts. She was the first African-American Congresswoman. She was the first African-American to run for president, and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. She never allowed society's expectations of black women dictate what she believed she could achieve, despite the intimidation tactics of many both in and outside the political realm. She was a fierce advocate for equality and justice, and was unapologetic about her vision for an America that fully embraced freedom. In everything she did, she strove for excellence, trailblazing the way for future black and women elected leaders; and

WHEREAS, Shirley Anita St. Hill was born November 30, 1924 in Brooklyn, New York. She was the oldest of four children born to Ruby Seale and Charles Christopher St. Hill. Her parents were both immigrants from the Caribbean region. When Shirley was five years old, she and her two sisters were sent to Barbados to live with their maternal grandmother, Emaline Seale. As a result, Shirley spoke with a recognizable West Indian accent throughout her life, and she would always consider herself a Barbadian American. Shirley attended a one-room schoolhouse that took education seriously. She accredits this strict, traditional education for her oratory and writing skills. She later returned to the United States in 1934, and attended Girls' High School in Brooklyn, a highly regarded, integrated school; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm graduated cum laude from Brooklyn College in 1946 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. She had a distinguished undergraduate career where she won prizes for her debating skills, and was a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She went on to earn her Master of Arts in Elementary Education from the Teachers College at Columbia University in 1952; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm was an authority on education and youth issues, and her experience within these fields opened doors for her political career. From 1953 to 1959 she was a Director at the Friends Day Nursery in Brooklyn and the Hamilton-Madison Child Care Center in Lower Manhattan. From 1959 to 1964 she was an Educational Consultant for the Division of Day Care. During this time, she became interested in politics, working as a volunteer for white-dominated political clubs in Brooklyn, and with the Bedford-Stuyvesant Political League and the League of Women Voters. She was also a representative of the Brooklyn Branch of the National Association of Colored Women; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm began her career as an elected official in the New York State Assembly, where she served as a member from 1965 to 1968. She was the second African American to be elected to the New York State Assembly. From the onset of her career, she made her mark by championing rights for minorities and other populations who tended to be neglected in the political arena. She argued against the state's literacy test requiring English, maintaining that just because a person "functions better in his native language is no sign a person is illiterate". She was a leader in a campaign by the statewide Council of Elected Negro Democrats for Black representation in key committees in the State Assembly. She sponsored many programs that helped disenfranchised groups, such as the SEEK Program (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge), which

provided disadvantaged students the chance to enter college while receiving remedial education. She also was successful in extending employment benefits to domestic workers; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm ran for the United States House of Representatives from New York's 12th Congressional District in 1968. It was during this campaign that she coined her infamous slogan "unbought and unbossed". In an upset victory, she became the first black woman elected to Congress; and

WHEREAS, While in Congress, Chisholm earned the nickname "Fighting Shirley", and introduced more than 50 pieces of legislation advocating for racial and gender equality, the plight of the poor, and ending the Vietnam War. She was first assigned to the House Agricultural Committee, and, although she felt the placement was irrelevant given her urban district, she worked to expand the Food Stamp Program, and played a critical role in the creation of the Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC Program). She was later assigned to the Education and Labor Committee, and was the third highest-ranking member there when she retired from Congress; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm was dedicated to eradicating systemic gender and racial inequality, and personally held herself accountable to that goal. All of those Chisholm hired to work in her office were women, half of whom were Black. In 1971, she became a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and that same year, she also became a founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus, two organizations that continue to exist today; and

WHEREAS, Chisholm announced her Presidential bid on January 25, 1972. On that day, she became the first black major-party candidate to run for President of the United States, and the first woman to ever run for the Democratic Party's national nomination. During the announcement, she discussed her vision for creating "a new America in 1972". Despite numerous injustices on the campaign trail, hundreds of thousands of Americans including students, women, and minorities followed the "Chisholm Trail" and voted for her; and

WHEREAS, After leaving politics and retiring from Congress, Chisholm returned to her passion for education. She was named the Purington Chair at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. When she was not teaching Sociology Classes there, she visited colleges to speak to students about polarization and intolerance. She visited over 150 campuses before retiring in 1991. In 1993, President Bill Clinton nominated Chisholm to be the US Ambassador to Jamaica, but she could not fulfill the role due to poor health. That same year, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Shirley Chisholm passed January 1, 2005 in Ormond Beach, Florida. In 2015, Chisholm was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. Of her legacy, Chisholm once said, "I want history to remember me as a black woman who lived in the 20th Century and how dared to be herself. I want to be remembered as a catalyst for change in America"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Shirley Chisholm's election as the first African-American Congresswoman in the United States of America.