

Legislation Text

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Honoring and celebrating Philadelphia's Living Legends: Leon A. Williams, Esq., Michael Coard, Esq., Rasheedah Phillips, Esq., George Burrell, Esq., and Keir Bradford-Grey, Esq., who are all respected and distinguished leaders in the field of law, as part of the commemoration of Black History Month.

WHEREAS, Leon A. Williams, Esq. is an attorney and activist who has inspired countless individuals throughout his career. Born and raised in North Philadelphia, Williams graduated from Murrell Dobbins High School in 1966. Williams was drafted into military service during the Vietnam War in 1968. Upon completion of his military service, Williams enrolled at Community College of Philadelphia where he was introduced to activism and learned how to organize around issues of importance to the African American community. He then transferred to Temple University and earned a Bachelor of Science in Education and a master's degree in Psychoeducational Processes, before setting his sights on law school. After graduating from Delaware Law School at Widener University in 1982, Williams briefly worked for the Public Defender's Office before starting his own solo practice. Being concerned with Black men being gunned down by police and the police not being held accountable for their actions, he researched an underutilized law that allows citizens to bypass the District Attorney's office and file a private criminal complaint seeking an arrest warrant. Williams filed a private criminal complaint against an FBI agent and an additional complaint against two state parole agents for the killing of unarmed Black men. One of those complaints was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. Williams pursued the Office of District Attorney of Philadelphia, twice in 1997 and 2001. His candidacy was monumental as he campaigned as an Independent working to reform police corruption and prosecutorial discretion. His advocacy and dedication paved the way for independent candidates to be successful in city-wide elections; and

WHEREAS, Michael Coard, Esq. is an experienced trial attorney and a distinguished and talented writer for the Philadelphia Tribune. Coard grew up in North Philadelphia and attended Masterman High School. After graduating from Masterman, Coard attended Cheney University for his undergraduate degree and Ohio State University for his law degree on a full scholarship. After graduating from law school, Coard made it his mission to guarantee African Americans their constitutionally protected right to be represented in court. He feels that everyone deserves to have their case heard in trial no matter how stacked the odds seem against them. During the course of his legal career, Coard has served at the Law Offices at Charles Bowser Law Center and as Legal Counsel for State Senator Hardy Williams. In addition to his esteemed legal career, Coard is an Adjunct Professor, teaching classes on the history and significance of race in America; and

WHEREAS, Rasheedah Phillips, Esq. is a Philadelphia attorney who has dedicated her life to ensuring individuals have adequate opportunities to obtain housing and assisting low-income individuals with obtaining legal representation. Phillips earned her undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice from Temple University in 2005, and she earned her law degree from Temple University's Beasley School of Law in 2008. For over ten years, she served with Community Legal Services as Managing Attorney and Managing Attorney for Housing Policy. Phillips currently serves as Director of Housing with PolicyLink, where she partners with communities working directly on the ground, supporting people with lived experiences of housing insecurity in their efforts to access housing justice and equitable, long-term future. Phillips' accomplishments as a lawyer have been recognized through numerous awards, such as the Housing Justice Award from the National Housing Law

Project, 40 under 40 designation from the City and State of Pennsylvania, the Outstanding Young Attorney Award from the Barristers Association of Philadelphia, and Black Law Student Association Alumni Award from Temple University Law School. Her work has also been published in the Temple University Political and Civil Rights Journal, as well as the Villanova Law Review; and

WHEREAS, George Burrell, Esq. attended the Wharton School of Business, and Carey Law School at the University of Pennsylvania. After graduating from law school, Burrell went on to become Deputy Mayor of Philadelphia under Mayor William Green, and became a partner in two area law firms, Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell, and Hippel, as well as Fox, Rothschild, O'Brien, and Frankel. He also founded the minority owned firm of Burrell, Waxman, Donaghy, and Lee in 1985. In addition to his distinguished legal career, Burrell had a calling towards public service. In 1987, he ran for and won an at-large seat on Philadelphia City Council. As a member of the City Council, he served as Chair of the Labor and Civil Service Committee, as well as Chair of the Licenses and Inspections Committee. While a City Councilmember, he sponsored legislation that enabled vendors the ability to operate on City streets. Burrell resigned from Council to run for Mayor in 1990, but was unsuccessful in that election. He subsequently joined the Administration of Mayor John Street in 2000 and served as the Secretary of External Affairs in his Cabinet. After leaving city government, Burrell was named General Counsel and Executive Vice President of PRWT Services, Inc., one of the nation's fastest growing minority enterprises. Currently, Burrell serves as *of counsel* to Kleinbard LLC, where he works with the firm's Business and Finance Department, as well as the firm's Government Relations group; and

WHEREAS, Keir Bradford-Grey is an accomplished attorney who has dedicated her professional career to representing those who are low-income. Bradford-Grey began her career after graduating from Albany State University with a degree in Criminal Justice and her law degree from Ohio Northern University by becoming an Assistant Public Defender with the Defender Association of Philadelphia. After spending eight years in the Public Defender's Office, she moved to Delaware and began working as a Federal Public Defender. She spent five years in federal service before coming back to Pennsylvania where she served as the Chief Defender for Montgomery County for three years. In 2015, Bradford-Grey returned to Philadelphia to become the Chief Defender for the Philadelphia Defenders Association, where she has been the City's chief advocate for comprehensive criminal justice reform. Currently, she serves as a Partner in the law firm of Montgomery, McCracken, Walker, & Rhodes, where she works in the Litigation Department, as well as the White Collar and Government Investigations Practice Group; and

WHEREAS, All of these Living Legends, in great and diverse ways, have positively impacted the City of Philadelphia via their legal representation of our citizens; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors and celebrates Philadelphia's Living Legends: Leon A. Williams, Esq., Michael Coard, Esq., Rasheedah Phillips, Esq., George Burrell, Esq., and Keir Bradford-Grey, Esq., who are all respected and distinguished leaders in the field of law, as part of the commemoration of Black History Month.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to these Living Legends as further evidence of the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.