



Legislation Text

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Commemorating the 60th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, honoring the lives of those lost, and recognizing the Reverend Arthur Price Jr., Philadelphia native and pastor at 16th Street Baptist, for his continued work on behalf of the community.

WHEREAS, The 16th Street Baptist Church, first organized as the First Colored Baptist Church in 1873, was the first black church established in Birmingham just two years after the city was founded; and

WHEREAS, The present building was designed by prominent black architect Wallace Rayfield, and was constructed in 1911 by the local black contractor T.C. Windham. In addition to the main sanctuary, the building houses a basement auditorium, used for meetings and lectures, and several ancillary rooms used for Sunday school and smaller groups; and

WHEREAS, As one of the primary institutions in the black community, the 16th Street Baptist Church has hosted prominent speakers and visitors throughout its history, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Paul Robeson and Ralph Bunche; and

WHEREAS, During the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s, the 16th Street Baptist Church served as an organizational headquarters, site of mass meetings and rallying point for African Americans protesting widespread institutionalized racism in Birmingham, Alabama, and the South. The church was used as a meeting place for leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) such as Fred Shuttlesworth, James Bevel, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Leading up to the 1960s Birmingham had earned a reputation as a tense, violent and racially segregated city. Bombings at black homes and institutions were a regular occurrence, with at least 21 separate explosions recorded at black properties and churches in the eight years before 1963, however none of these explosions had resulted in fatalities. These attacks earned the city the nickname "Bombingham"; and

WHEREAS, On Sunday, September 15, 1963, 4 members of the Ku Klux Klan planted 19 sticks of dynamite outside the basement of the 16th street Baptist Church. At 10:22 a.m. there was an explosion that killed four young girls - Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Denise McNair. Twenty-two other victims suffered injuries; and

WHEREAS, The brutal terrorist attack and the deaths of the four little girls shocked the nation and drew international attention to the violent struggle for civil rights in Birmingham. The bombing was described by Martin Luther King Jr. as "one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity. Over, 8,000 people attended the girls' funeral service at Reverend John Porter's Sixth Avenue Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing marked a turning point in the United States during the civil rights movement and also contributed to support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by Congress and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, The church reopened to members of the public on June 7, 1964 and continues to remain an active place of worship today, with an average weekly attendance of nearly 2,000 worshippers. Reverend Arthur Price, Jr. serves as Pastor of the Church in Birmingham, AL to which he was called in January 2002; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Arthur Price Jr. was born in Philadelphia and grew up in South Philadelphia. He completed undergraduate degree study at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and received the Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice. Prior to coming to Birmingham, Reverend Price worked in both the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office and the Monroe County District Attorney's Office in Rochester, New York. Reverend Price also graduated from Colgate Rochester Divinity School and received the Master of Divinity degree, emphasizing biblical studies; and

WHEREAS, As the pastor of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Reverend Price has been a steadfast pillar of strength in the Birmingham community, working tirelessly to heal the wounds of the past, foster unity, and promote a vision of tolerance, and understanding for the future. Under his leadership he has created programs for first-time offenders, and drug offenders in his ministry; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Price's dedication to his congregation and the broader Birmingham community has been exemplary, and his efforts in preserving the memory of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing have ensured that this tragedy is never forgotten, allowing us to learn from the past and work toward a more just and equitable future; and

WHEREAS, The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church served as a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement, galvanizing individuals and communities across the nation to stand against racism, injustice, and discrimination; and

WHEREAS, The 60th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church presents an opportunity for reflection upon the progress that has been made as a society in the fight against racism and injustice and to renew commitment to the principles of equality, unity, and social justice; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby commemorates the 60th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, honoring the lives of those lost, and recognizing the Reverend Arthur Price Jr., Philadelphia native and pastor at 16th Street Baptist, for his continued work on behalf of the community.