

Chapter No. 2151

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***SENATE
CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
No. 554***

Originated in Senate

Liz Welch

Secretary

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 554

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF NORTH MISSISSIPPI RURAL LEGAL SERVICES (NMRLS) AND COMMENDING THEIR MISSION OF ADVOCACY.

WHEREAS, North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) was born amidst the landscape of the 1960s push for social reform. It was organized in 1966 as a training program for law students at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) School of Law. The funding agency was the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Under the first funding grant, services were provided to citizens in Lafayette, Benton, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Marshall, Tippah and Union Counties; and

WHEREAS, originally called Lafayette County Legal Aid, NMRLS was thought of by its organizers as a combination legal services and teaching program. The first director and his staff lawyers were members of the faculty and worked part time in each capacity. The goal was to develop a law school curriculum with a focus on legal problems of the poor; and

WHEREAS, NMRLS opened its first office in Oxford, Mississippi, on August 11, 1966. A second office was opened in June 1967 in Holly Springs. Three new branch offices were opened in 1969 which were located in Batesville, West Point and Greenwood. The Tupelo and Cleveland branch offices were opened in 1977. The Greenville, Clarksdale, Lexington and Grenada branch offices were opened in 1978. The last office to open was in Tunica in 1986; and

WHEREAS, NMRLS' ties with the Ole Miss Law School were severed in July 1968. After this break, NMRLS joined several other poverty programs as part of the Community Extension Program of Mary Holmes Junior College. Mary Holmes is a small predominately black junior college located in rural West Point, Mississippi. The program's operating focus then shifted from being a training tool for law students to a program committed only to providing quality legal assistance to the poor. By 1972 the program boasted impressive gains. It had an operating budget of \$448,000.00, five branch offices (Oxford, Holly Springs, Batesville, West Point and Greenwood), and over 37 employees; and

WHEREAS, the program's connection to local communities during the early days was maintained through social and community workers. The community workers were nonprofessionals who worked with program attorneys. They played a key role in organizing the poor, working on individual client problems and educating the poor on welfare and consumer issues. They offered essential outreach

services to the community. An effective paralegal program took the place of the social and community workers, but presently, there are no paralegals on staff; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 93-355 was signed into law in 1974 as one of the final acts of then President Richard Nixon prior to his resignation, which created the national Legal Services Corporation (LSC). On February 11, 1976, NMRLS was incorporated as an independent nonprofit corporation receiving funds from the Legal Services Corporation, its express purpose being to provide legal services, education and advocacy for people in poverty, in conformity with the LSC Act and amendments thereto; and

WHEREAS, at its height, NMRLS had a budget of over \$3 Million and a total staff of 118 employees, including 32 lawyers, 34 paralegals/community workers, four legal assistants, and 48 support personnel. It offered services through an administrative office and 12 branch offices to 372,000 potential clients in 39 North Mississippi counties. Of this number 75,000 were elderly residents with only minimal income. In 1996, the United States Congress cut funding for civil legal services to the poor by one-third and added severe restrictions upon the types of legal services a grantee could provide. NMRLS currently services its 253,540 eligible low-income population (based on 2011 American Community Survey three-year estimate and other sources) in its 39-county service area with an administrative office and four

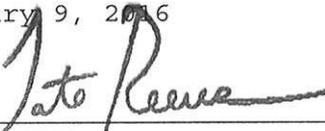
branch offices located in Oxford, West Point, Clarksdale and Greenville; and

WHEREAS, the Honorary 50th Anniversary Committee is:
Co-Chairs: Honorable Ronnie Musgrove and Carlos Moore, Esq.;
Committee Members: Honorable Mike Espy; State Representative Willie J. Perkins, Sr., Esq.; Joyce Freeland, Esq.; I. Richard Gershon, Esq.; Richard Howorth; Charles M. Merkel, III, Esq.; and Reverend Thomas Morris, Sr., Esq.; and it is with great pride that we join the Honorary Committee in paying tribute to this most effective and public-spirited organization whose advocacy for the less fortunate among us is a matter of record:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby recognize the 50th Anniversary Celebration of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) and commend its mission of advocacy.

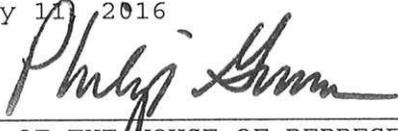
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to the Executive Director of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE
February 9, 2016



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
February 11, 2016



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES