

House Resolution 297

By: Representatives Schofield of the 60th, Scott of the 76th, Davis of the 87th, Alexander of the 66th, and Hutchinson of the 107th

A RESOLUTION

1 Commending Merri Ellen Sheffield for her advocacy in systemic racism, environmental
2 justice, community building, and equity as a grassroots leader in her community; and for
3 other purposes.

4 WHEREAS, by her actions, including taking a resident leader to Virginia to remove the word
5 "fugitive" from her record, thus making her employable; leading a complete count in the
6 2010 and 2020 census; and supporting her neighbors impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic,
7 Merri Ellen Sheffield has exemplified servant leadership; and

8 WHEREAS, she was born in Atlanta, and for the past 26 years, she has resided in Historic
9 College Park less than five miles from the rented two-bedroom one-bath wood-framed
10 duplex that her parents and three siblings called home. She attended segregated public
11 schools and experienced the integration of the teaching staff and student body first-hand,
12 which transformed her future and the focus of her work; and

13 WHEREAS, Merri was the first in her family to graduate from college, earning a bachelor's
14 degree in journalism from Georgia State University. Her career as a reporter, public
15 information officer, and marketing and public relations coordinator in public education,
16 healthcare, and residential construction and development was her complete focus until the
17 Great Recession of 2008, when everything changed. Suddenly, Merri found herself

18 following the legacy of her mother, Shirley, and her grandmother, Golden Walker, who had
19 both dedicated their lives to serving marginalized individuals and families; and

20 WHEREAS, in 2017, she founded the nonprofit BECAUSE Inc., dedicated to Building
21 Engaged Communities Aligned, Sustained, and Educated. Hearing her mother's voice saying
22 "you can be part of the problem, which is easy, or you can make the choice to be part of the
23 solution," she knew her calling; and

24 WHEREAS, she had always told the stories rather than being a participant; today, Merri gets
25 into the trenches. She spreads the news of everything she learns in every training opportunity
26 possible. Educating people about inequities, such as the shocking condition of our nation's
27 waterways and water infrastructure, is one of her passions. In 2019, Eco-Action Inc. and the
28 Atlanta Watershed Learning Network selected her to present along with other community
29 leaders at River Rally, a conference for environmentalists from every corner of the United
30 States. While there, she learned that her experiences growing up and living in Atlanta were
31 far different from those living across the nation. The need for a greater understanding of
32 those different from oneself took on a new level of importance; and

33 WHEREAS, in 2020, Merri, like everyone, had to pivot in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
34 Learning that more than 500 of her neighbors were behind on their utilities and faced with
35 disconnection, she applied for a Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) grant through
36 BECAUSE Inc. and was able to pay the past due balances for 48 families. Merri's efforts led
37 to her selection as a winner of the Ford Freedom Unsung Heroes of COVID-19 Award. Ford
38 Motor Company celebrated ten individuals from across the United States who performed
39 heroic and selfless acts to support African American communities during the pandemic; and

40 WHEREAS, Merri is a champion of the Flint River Watershed, a sustainability ambassador
41 for the City of Atlanta, an EcoDistricts accredited professional, and a PSE Regional Resident
42 Leader for Equity, among other designations; her spirit comes alive working with individuals

43 as they strive to overcome obstacles, reach their goals, and know their voice and ideas
44 deserve to be heard and brought to fruition.

45 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
46 the members of this body commend Merri Ellen Sheffield for her outstanding
47 civic-mindedness and many years of devoted service to her community.

48 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
49 and directed to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to Merri
50 Ellen Sheffield.