

## Senate Resolution 126

By: Senators Jackson of the 2nd, Jones of the 10th, Anderson of the 43rd, Butler of the 55th, Rahman of the 5th and others

## A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life of civil rights leader and United States Representative John Robert Lewis  
2 and dedicating a bridge in his memory; and for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, John Robert Lewis was an American hero; the epitome of a patriot; one of the  
4 founders of a more perfect Union; a self-sacrificing soldier for the truth that all men and  
5 women are created equal endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that  
6 among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; a passionate fighter for the right  
7 to vote and against voter suppression; an ambassador of justice and equality; a disciple of his  
8 Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; a loving husband and father; and one of Georgia's best citizens  
9 throughout all history to date, whose contributions to the betterment of life on this Earth can  
10 never be forgotten or unfelt; and

11 WHEREAS, a son of sharecroppers, Mr. Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, in Troy,  
12 Alabama, the third of ten children of Willie Mae and Eddie Lewis, and departed his life on  
13 July 17, 2020; and

14 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis leaves a legacy of divinely inspired, nonviolent social change; and

15 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis experienced racism and segregation in his youth that he felt a  
16 burning desire within his soul to speak up; and

17 WHEREAS, in 1955, Mr. Lewis first heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the radio and he  
18 closely followed Dr. King's Montgomery bus boycott later that year; and

19 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis wrote a letter to Dr. King, who sent him a round-trip bus ticket to  
20 visit him in Montgomery in 1958; and

21 WHEREAS, by then, Mr. Lewis had begun his studies at American Baptist Theological  
22 Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee, where he worked as a dishwasher and janitor to pay for  
23 his education; and

24 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis graduated from the American Baptist Theological Seminary and was  
25 ordained as a Baptist minister and went on to receive a bachelor's degree in religion and  
26 philosophy from Fisk University; and

27 WHEREAS, as a student, Mr. Lewis was dedicated to the civil rights movement; and

28 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis's first arrest came in February, 1960, when he and other students  
29 demanded service at whites-only lunch counters in Nashville in what was the first prolonged  
30 battle of the movement that evolved into the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,  
31 of which he was a founder and leader; and

32 WHEREAS, in 1961, Mr. Lewis became one of the 13 original Freedom Riders, a group of  
33 Black and white activists who challenged segregated interstate travel in the South; and

34 WHEREAS, during the Freedom Rides, Mr. Lewis was left unconscious in a pool of his own  
35 blood outside the Greyhound Bus Terminal, left with others equally as badly injured – one  
36 paralyzed for life – in Montgomery, Alabama, after they were attacked by hundreds of white  
37 people; and

38 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis later stated that, "If there was anything I learned on that long, bloody  
39 bus trip of 1961, it was this – that we were in for a long, bloody fight here in the American  
40 South. And I intended to stay in the middle of it."; and

41 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis was arrested at least 40 times from 1960 to 1966 and spent countless  
42 days and nights in county jails and 31 days in Mississippi's notoriously brutal Parchman  
43 Penitentiary in pursuit of freedom's call; and

44 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis led demonstrations against racially segregated restrooms, hotels,  
45 restaurants, public parks, and swimming pools, and he rose up against other indignities of  
46 second-class citizenship; and

47 WHEREAS, through conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, and undeterred at the risk of his  
48 own life, Mr. Lewis was repeatedly tormented and beaten senseless by law enforcement and  
49 other freelance hoodlums and was spat upon and burned with cigarettes; and

50 WHEREAS, on March 7, 1965, Mr. Lewis led one of the most famous marches in American  
51 history; and

52 WHEREAS, on that date, in the vanguard of 600 people demanding the voting rights they  
53 had been denied, Mr. Lewis marched partway across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma,  
54 Alabama, into a waiting phalanx of Alabama state troopers in riot gear; and

55 WHEREAS, ordered to disperse, the protesters silently stood their ground; to which the  
56 Alabama state troopers responded with tear gas, bullwhips, and rubber tubing wrapped in  
57 barbed wire; and

58 WHEREAS, in the melee, which came to be known as Bloody Sunday, an Alabama state  
59 trooper cracked Mr. Lewis's skull with a billy club, knocking him to the ground, then hit him  
60 again when he tried to get up; and

61 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis shed his blood and gave of his body, nearly to death, to secure the  
62 right to vote for all in America; and

63 WHEREAS, the televised images of the beatings of Mr. Lewis and scores of others outraged  
64 the nation and galvanized support for the Voting Rights Act, which President Lyndon B.  
65 Johnson presented to the a joint session of Congress eight days later and signed into law on  
66 August 6, 1965; and

67 WHEREAS, throughout his life, Mr. Lewis kept fighting for freedom, equality, and justice  
68 with the same tenacity of his youth; and

69 WHEREAS, while Mr. Lewis represented Georgia's 5th congressional district, his natural  
70 constituency was disadvantaged and mistreated people everywhere; his relentless pursuit of  
71 justice led him to be called "the conscience of the Congress" by his colleagues; and

72 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis stated: "Dr. King and others inspired me to get in what I call good  
73 trouble, necessary trouble. And I think we're going to have generations for years to come  
74 that will be prepared to get in trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble. And lead us to higher

75 heights. It's a struggle that doesn't last one day, one week, one month, one year. It is the  
76 struggle of a lifetime, or maybe many lifetimes."; and

77 WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis stated: "You have to be hopeful. You have to be optimistic. If not,  
78 you will get lost in despair. When I travel around the country, I say, 'Don't get down – you  
79 cannot get down.' I'm not down. I got arrested, beaten, left bloody and unconscious. But  
80 I haven't given up. And you cannot give up."; and

81 WHEREAS, when President Barack Obama awarded Mr. Lewis the Presidential Medal of  
82 Freedom in 2011, President Obama said: "Generations from now, when parents teach their  
83 children what is meant by courage, the story of John Lewis will come to mind – an American  
84 who knew that change could not wait for some other person or some other time; whose life  
85 is a lesson in the fierce urgency of now."; and

86 WHEREAS, America is a freer and better nation and this state is a freer and better state  
87 because of the sacrifices of Mr. Lewis; and

88 WHEREAS, for his work in desegregating interstate travel, for his sacrifices on a bridge, and  
89 for his lifetime of work of being a bridge builder, it is abundantly fitting and proper that this  
90 remarkable and distinguished Georgian be appropriately recognized by dedicating one of the  
91 largest bridges in this state in his memory.

92 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND ENACTED BY THE GENERAL  
93 ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA that the bridge over the Savannah River between downtown  
94 Savannah and Hutchinson Island (US 17/SR 404) in Chatham County is dedicated as the  
95 John Lewis Freedom Bridge.

96 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Transportation is authorized and  
97 directed to erect and maintain appropriate signs dedicating the John Lewis Freedom Bridge.

98 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized  
99 and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the  
100 family of Mr. John Robert Lewis and to the Department of Transportation.