

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 262

By Turner

A RESOLUTION to recognize and honor the Lee Sisters of
Memphis, leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in recognizing those individuals who persevere in the quest for justice, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles; and

WHEREAS, the Lee Sisters of Memphis were essential in the fight against the injustices of the Jim Crow era, devoting themselves to the Civil Rights Movement both locally and nationally; they eschewed all fear of repercussion to demand equal rights and liberties for all American citizens; and

WHEREAS, these seven sisters, Ernestine Lee Henning, Sandra Faye Lee Swift, Brenda Lee Turner, Elaine Lee Turner, Joan Lee Nelson, Peggy Jayne Lee, and Susan Lee, were at the forefront of protests to end segregation in the United States, breaking down racial barriers for those of their generation and generations to come; and

WHEREAS, in February 2017, the African American Museum of Memphis and the Shelby County Historical Commission erected a historical marker at the corner of Main and Gayoso streets that commemorates the instrumental contributions of these sisters, veritable heroes of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the dedication ceremony for the historical marker was held on Saturday, March 25, 2017; and

WHEREAS, the daughters of Robert and Alversa Williams Lee, the Lee Sisters were described by *Jet* magazine as the "Most Arrested Civil Rights Family," having been arrested seventeen times for Civils Rights activities; and

WHEREAS, as college and high school students, the Lee Sisters took part in protests throughout Memphis in the 1960s; whenever there was a Civil Rights protest in Memphis, the Lee Sisters were likely there in numbers; and

WHEREAS, Ernestine, the eldest and a junior at LeMoyne College, was one of the leaders who helped organize student protests against segregated public facilities, such as the protest on March 19, 1960, when police arrested students from both LeMoyne and Owen Junior College for sitting in at Cossitt and Peabody libraries; these sit-ins sparked the desegregation movement in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, soon thereafter, the other Lee Sisters joined the protests. In an August 1960 sit-in at lunch counters on Main Street, Ernestine and Ruth Elaine were arrested at Shainberg's; Sandra and Brenda were arrested at Bry's; and Joan was arrested at Lowenstein's. The two oldest sisters were taken to the city jail, while Brenda, Ruth Elaine, and Joan were escorted to juvenile court; and

WHEREAS, in 1965, Ruth Elaine and Joan, along with younger sisters Peggy Jayne, sixteen, and Susan, twelve, were arrested while picketing against job discrimination; and

WHEREAS, the Lee Sisters were also involved in national protests; Joan participated in the 1963 March on Washington; Ruth Elaine marched in Selma in 1965; and five of the sisters, along with brothers Wesley, Lewis, Clifford, and Mark, joined the Meredith March Against Fear in 1966; and

WHEREAS, in 1965, the members of the Lee family were honored for their role in the Civil Rights Movement with an Award of Recognition, given by NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins; and

WHEREAS, the Lee Sisters helped precipitate the end of the Jim Crow era and the beginning of this nation's journey toward a more egalitarian society, and it is fitting that they be recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we hereby join with the Shelby County Historical Commission and the African American Museum of Memphis in recognizing and honoring the Lee Sisters of Memphis, whose brave contributions to the Civil Rights Movement will inspire generations to come.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.