

By: Representative Watson

To: Rules

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 4

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMEMORATING THE LIFE AND
2 REMEMBERING THE LEGACY AND DISTINGUISHED SERVICE OF MISSISSIPPI
3 CIVIL RIGHTS ICON VERNON FERDINAND DAHMER, SR., OF HATTIESBURG,
4 MISSISSIPPI, IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS
5 PASSING.

6 WHEREAS, it was once stated by the late Dr. Martin Luther
7 King, Jr., that "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he
8 stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands
9 at times of challenge and controversy," a statement that is very
10 befitting of the life and catalog of service of Mr. Vernon
11 Ferdinand Dahmer, Sr.; and

12 WHEREAS, January 10, 2016, marks the 50th anniversary of
13 Vernon Dahmer, Sr.'s, death, after he succumbed to the injuries
14 sustained from a fiery attack on the Dahmer Family home on the
15 northern outskirts of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in the early
16 morning hours of January 10, 2016, by a group of virulent
17 antagonists opposed to his efforts to register African Americans
18 to vote and ensure equality for all races; and



19 WHEREAS, born on March 10, 1908, the youngest of twelve in
20 the Kelly Settlement of Forrest County, Mississippi, to a
21 Caucasian father, George Washington Dahmer, and a bi-racial
22 mother, Ellen Louvenia Kelly Dahmer; Vernon, whose fair complexion
23 could have allowed him to pass as a Caucasian man, attended Bay
24 Springs High School until the 10th grade, and chose to forego the
25 privilege of living as a Caucasian before embarking upon life as a
26 farmer and a heralding voice for the poor and disenfranchised
27 African-American population of South Mississippi, joining the
28 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
29 and subsequently serving two terms as president of the Forrest
30 County Chapter of the NAACP, even after witnessing his siblings
31 move north, some of whom passed for Caucasian; and

32 WHEREAS, a shrewd businessman, avid activist and notable
33 figure in Mississippi's vein of the Civil Rights Movement, Mr.
34 Dahmer was not beholden to stigmas and injustices which created
35 hostility among the races, but treated everyone with the same
36 level of dignity and respect irrespective of their color or creed,
37 and died defending his family and the empowering principle of
38 equality, a philosophy that remained the central nexus of his life
39 and works; and

40 WHEREAS, one who dedicated his entire essence and being to
41 redirecting the plight of an oppressed citizenry whose voices were
42 muted through an elitist and politically induced inability to
43 vote, Mr. Dahmer confronted the power-yielding officials whose



44 discriminatory practices obstructed African Americans' right to
45 vote through intimidation, literacy exams and poll taxes without
46 trepidation, as made evident by his 1950 decision to join 14 other
47 African-American plaintiffs in bringing suit against then Forrest
48 County Circuit Clerk and registrar of voters for his
49 unconstitutional administration of the voting laws; and

50 WHEREAS, with the budding friendship and assistance of NAACP
51 Field Secretary Medgar Evers, Mr. Dahmer, then president of the
52 Forrest County Chapter, founded a youth NAACP chapter in
53 Hattiesburg, and continued to be supportive of the Student
54 Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), whose aid he personally
55 sought to help assist the voter registration efforts in
56 Hattiesburg, and to whose volunteer workers his farm home suddenly
57 became a refuge, particularly for Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins,
58 the first two SNCC volunteers to become visibly present in his
59 concerted efforts to increase African-American voter inclusion and
60 participation in the election processes of Forrest County; and

61 WHEREAS, an impassioned visionary and optimist for equality,
62 the Dahmer's farm was used for voter registration projects, and
63 eventually received the approval of the Forrest County Sheriff,
64 who also served as the county's tax collector, to keep a voter
65 registration book in his grocery store, which enabled those
66 African Americans with a burning desire to register to vote, to do
67 so, and Mr. Dahmer publicly announced his willingness to pay the



68 poll taxes for the right to vote for those individuals unable to
69 afford the cost of doing so themselves; and

70 WHEREAS, a great humanitarian by every definition of the
71 term, Mr. Dahmer's tireless and zealous advocacy for voter
72 equality placed him in an unappealing light to those who opposed
73 his efforts, which required him and his wife, Ellie, to sleep in
74 shifts throughout the night after becoming the target of numerous
75 vicious death threats over the span of several years, until the
76 dreaded events of January 10, 1966, became a stark reality in the
77 form of a living nightmare that forever changed their lives and
78 gripped the Hattiesburg community as news of the heinous act
79 perpetrated under the cloak of darkness at the Dahmer's residence
80 sent shockwaves rippling throughout the state and nation; and

81 WHEREAS, in the wake of the horrific tragedy, the Hattiesburg
82 Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of William Carey College
83 President Dr. Ralph Noonkester and Bob Beech of the Hattiesburg
84 Ministers' Project had led a community effort to rebuild the
85 Dahmer home with the assistance of local and state businesses such
86 as the Masonite Corporation, Alexander Materials and Frierson
87 Building Materials that donated materials, local unions that
88 donated their services, and students from the University of
89 Southern Mississippi who volunteered unskilled labor; and

90 WHEREAS, Mr. Vernon Dahmer, Sr.'s, diligence in championing
91 the advocacy for voter's rights with unyielding fervor
92 unintentionally branded him martyrdom, and for his personal



93 sacrifice, his name is included among those of 40 martyrs, 19 of
94 whom received their heavenly summons to the vanguard of civil
95 rights immortality, to be engraved upon the Civil Rights Memorial
96 outside the Southern Poverty Law Center's office in Montgomery,
97 Alabama; and

98 WHEREAS, the slain civil rights leader remains a model today,
99 as his mantra that: "Every man needs to do his own thinking. If
100 you don't vote, you don't count," continues to provide meaningful
101 direction to those called to service of mankind and a harkening
102 voice of reasoning from the grave to remember the valiant and
103 sometimes deadly undertakings of those who were forerunners for
104 the privilege to vote that all Americans now experience; and

105 WHEREAS, posthumously, Dahmer's legacy has been commemorated
106 by the City of Hattiesburg with the naming of a street and a park
107 in his honor, the erection and dedication of a memorial in the
108 park bearing his namesake on July 26, 1986, and on February 3,
109 2007, William Carey University announced the inclusion of the
110 Vernon Dahmer Collection at its Hattiesburg campus, in recognition
111 of Dahmer's heroic contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, and
112 funded in part by a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council;
113 and

114 WHEREAS, in continuing to carry the torch for political and
115 social equality initially ignited and shouldered by her husband
116 Vernon, Mrs. Ellie Dahmer, after having been first elected in
117 1992, served more than a decade as Election Commissioner of



118 District 2, Forrest County, the very district in which her husband
119 gave his life for his voting rights advocacy without ever
120 experiencing the voting opportunity; and

121 WHEREAS, it is the policy of this Legislature to pay homage
122 to such a selfless individual as Mr. Dahmer, and it is with solemn
123 reverence and humility that we honor and cherish the memory of
124 this giant of an individual and patron citizen of Mississippi,
125 whose life evidences the fulfillment of a servant's response to a
126 people in need:

127 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
128 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE SENATE CONCURRING
129 THEREIN, That we do hereby commemorate the life and remember the
130 legacy and distinguished service of Mississippi Civil Rights icon
131 Vernon Ferdinand Dahmer, Sr., of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in
132 acknowledgment of the 50th anniversary of his passing.

133 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be
134 furnished to Mrs. Ellie Dahmer and the surviving Dahmer children,
135 forwarded to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History
136 and to the members of the Capitol Press Corps.

