

By: Representative Baria

To: Rules

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 23

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE
2 MISSISSIPPI ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION FOR THEIR EXTRAORDINARY
3 SERVICE OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS TO THE NUMBER OF MISSISSIPPIANS
4 LIVING IN POVERTY WITHOUT LEGAL ASSISTANCE.

5 WHEREAS, the great leader and drum major for justice,
6 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., once wrote in his legendary
7 Letter From a Birmingham Jail, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to
8 justice everywhere," and the Mississippi Access to Justice
9 Commission, which realizes that in order for justice to prevail
10 for all of us, the civil justice gap must be closed, and has
11 faithfully served for 10 years striving to make this possible; and

12 WHEREAS, the 23rd in the nation, this commission was created
13 by the Mississippi Supreme Court on June 28, 2006, out of sheer
14 necessity to develop a unified strategy to improve access to the
15 civil courts for the poor; and

16 WHEREAS, this development was an inevitability given that 44%
17 of Mississippi's population live in households in
18 lower-to-moderate income brackets where legal assistance is
19 unaffordable, ranking first in America for people living in



20 poverty, with approximately 696,000 people living at or below the
21 federal poverty level, additionally, the number of Mississippians
22 living in poverty has increased by 72% since 2000; and

23 WHEREAS, with this daunting task ahead, the commission
24 started by investigating the need for civil legal services to the
25 poor in Mississippi, developing policies and initiatives to assist
26 the judiciary in meeting these needs with a goal to provide
27 overarching support for the legal aid system in Mississippi by way
28 of increased funding, resources, raising awareness, reducing
29 barriers to access to civil justice and improving the quality and
30 efficiency of the delivery system; and

31 WHEREAS, perhaps the most important factor is that the
32 commission provides support for civil legal service providers
33 because, unlike individuals who have committed criminal acts who
34 are guaranteed a right to counsel, people involved in civil legal
35 matters are not guaranteed that right but should nevertheless be
36 deprived of the privilege to access the civil justice system as a
37 crucial resource to protect their families, homes and health; and

38 WHEREAS, to be a unifying entity as desired, the commission
39 is divided into the three following committees: Delivery System
40 Committee, Resource Development Committee and Public Awareness
41 Committee, which meet the primary goal of bringing together
42 providers to address the civil justice service gaps; and

43 WHEREAS, the commission recently added two more subcommittees
44 to join with like-minded professionals, the Medical-Legal



45 Partnership, doctors who follow the Hippocratic Oath, "I will
46 remember that I remain a member of society, with special
47 obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and
48 body as well as the infirm," and the Faith-Based Initiatives, many
49 of whom follow the passage of Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do right;
50 seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the
51 fatherless; plead the case of the widow"; and

52 WHEREAS, the challenges heaped upon the Mississippi Access to
53 Justice Commission are great with programs that require turning
54 away two clients for every one who seeks help due to limited
55 resources; however, the commission is gradually improving the
56 delivery system and reaching more people who need legal
57 assistance; and

58 WHEREAS, the work of this commission will not be done until
59 everyone has equal access to Mississippi's civil court system and
60 the state's providers have the capacity to serve everyone who
61 enters their doors, but this will not be a reality without the
62 legal community hearing loud and clear the heralding call from the
63 Mississippi Access to Justice Commission that, in the words of
64 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Injustice must be exposed,
65 with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human
66 conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be
67 cured"; and

68 WHEREAS, though there are still barriers to equality, the
69 commission has made great strides including: statewide public



70 hearings to guide its work; successfully petitioning the
71 Mississippi Supreme Court to amend the Rules of Professional
72 Conduct to allow for the unbundling of legal services; persuading
73 the Mississippi State Legislature to amend a section of the
74 Mississippi Code to change the requirement for an attorney to
75 represent guardians in guardianship cases where a child has few
76 assets; sponsoring local access to justice events; and receiving
77 an American Bar Association Access to Justice Commission Expansion
78 Grant in 2013; and

79 WHEREAS, the commission's current initiatives include many
80 ways to help self-represented litigants by developing forms for
81 divorce, emancipation and name change matters and easily
82 accessible ways to acquire and understand the forms, and they are
83 exploring innovative technology to help educate litigants about
84 what to expect in court and what happens after they download the
85 forms developed by the commission; and

86 WHEREAS, the future of our state is bright as the commission
87 plans to: increase its partnerships to librarians across the
88 state; develop training seminars and educational materials for
89 guiding court clerks in dealing with self-representative
90 litigants; host a Pro Bono Summit to education law firm managers
91 on the need for engaging attorneys in pro bono work; develop a
92 toolkit for their Medical-Legal Partnership and Faith-Based
93 Initiatives activities; explore lobbying for legislation nor court
94 rules to state that legal aid and access to justice is an



95 appropriate recipient of cy pres funds; examine other statutory
96 and procedural barriers for self-represented litigants; and
97 develop a work plan for access to justice in Mississippi for
98 people with limited English proficiency with the help of national
99 partners; and

100 WHEREAS, it is the policy of this Legislature to recognize
101 the accomplishments of an organization that goes above and beyond
102 what is thought possible to help the impoverished in the State of
103 Mississippi such as the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission,
104 lead by the humble and generous executive director Mrs. Tiffany
105 Graves, on this most auspicious occasion of its 10th anniversary
106 of service:

107 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
108 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE SENATE CONCURRING
109 THEREIN, That we do hereby commend and congratulate the
110 Mississippi Access of Justice Commission on their 10th
111 anniversary, we thank them for their devoted service and extend
112 heartiest wishes for success in all of their future endeavors.

113 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be
114 furnished to the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission, and to
115 the members of the Capitol Press Corps.

