

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.

