

By: Senator(s) Jackson (11th), Simmons (12th), Simmons (13th), Dearing, Barnett, Jordan, Witherspoon, Norwood, Butler, Frazier, Stone, Branning, Tollison, Blackmon, Bryan, Jolly, Horhn, Turner, Jackson (32nd), Dawkins, Hopson

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 554

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY  
2 CELEBRATION OF NORTH MISSISSIPPI RURAL LEGAL SERVICES (NMRLS) AND  
3 COMMENDING THEIR MISSION OF ADVOCACY.

4 WHEREAS, North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) was  
5 born amidst the landscape of the 1960s push for social reform. It  
6 was organized in 1966 as a training program for law students at  
7 the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) School of Law. The  
8 funding agency was the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).  
9 Under the first funding grant, services were provided to citizens  
10 in Lafayette, Benton, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Marshall, Tippah and  
11 Union Counties; and

12 WHEREAS, originally called Lafayette County Legal Aid, NMRLS  
13 was thought of by its organizers as a combination legal services  
14 and teaching program. The first director and his staff lawyers  
15 were members of the faculty and worked part time in each capacity.  
16 The goal was to develop a law school curriculum with a focus on  
17 legal problems of the poor; and



18           WHEREAS, NMRLS opened its first office in Oxford,  
19   Mississippi, on August 11, 1966. A second office was opened in  
20   June 1967 in Holly Springs. Three new branch offices were opened  
21   in 1969 which were located in Batesville, West Point and  
22   Greenwood. The Tupelo and Cleveland branch offices were opened in  
23   1977. The Greenville, Clarksdale, Lexington and Grenada branch  
24   offices were opened in 1978. The last office to open was in  
25   Tunica in 1986; and

26           WHEREAS, NMRLS' ties with the Ole Miss Law School were  
27   severed in July 1968. After this break, NMRLS joined several  
28   other poverty programs as part of the Community Extension Program  
29   of Mary Holmes Junior College. Mary Holmes is a small  
30   predominately black junior college located in rural West Point,  
31   Mississippi. The program's operating focus then shifted from  
32   being a training tool for law students to a program committed only  
33   to providing quality legal assistance to the poor. By 1972 the  
34   program boasted impressive gains. It had an operating budget of  
35   \$448,000.00, five branch offices (Oxford, Holly Springs,  
36   Batesville, West Point and Greenwood), and over 37 employees; and

37           WHEREAS, the program's connection to local communities during  
38   the early days was maintained through social and community  
39   workers. The community workers were nonprofessionals who worked  
40   with program attorneys. They played a key role in organizing the  
41   poor, working on individual client problems and educating the poor  
42   on welfare and consumer issues. They offered essential outreach



43 services to the community. An effective paralegal program took  
44 the place of the social and community workers, but presently,  
45 there are no paralegals on staff; and

46 WHEREAS, Public Law 93-355 was signed into law in 1974 as one  
47 of the final acts of then President Richard Nixon prior to his  
48 resignation, which created the national Legal Services Corporation  
49 (LSC). On February 11, 1976, NMRLS was incorporated as an  
50 independent nonprofit corporation receiving funds from the Legal  
51 Services Corporation, its express purpose being to provide legal  
52 services, education and advocacy for people in poverty, in  
53 conformity with the LSC Act and amendments thereto; and

54 WHEREAS, at its height, NMRLS had a budget of over \$3 Million  
55 and a total staff of 118 employees, including 32 lawyers, 34  
56 paralegals/community workers, four legal assistants, and 48  
57 support personnel. It offered services through an administrative  
58 office and 12 branch offices to 372,000 potential clients in 39  
59 North Mississippi counties. Of this number 75,000 were elderly  
60 residents with only minimal income. In 1996, the United States  
61 Congress cut funding for civil legal services to the poor by  
62 one-third and added severe restrictions upon the types of legal  
63 services a grantee could provide. NMRLS currently services its  
64 253,540 eligible low-income population (based on 2011 American  
65 Community Survey three-year estimate and other sources) in its  
66 39-county service area with an administrative office and four



67 branch offices located in Oxford, West Point, Clarksdale and  
68 Greenville; and

69 WHEREAS, the Honorary 50th Anniversary Committee is:

70 Co-Chairs: Honorable Ronnie Musgrove and Carlos Moore, Esq.;

71 Committee Members: Honorable Mike Espy; State Representative

72 Willie J. Perkins, Sr., Esq.; Joyce Freeland, Esq.; I. Richard

73 Gershon, Esq.; Richard Howorth; Charles M. Merkel, III, Esq.; and

74 Reverend Thomas Morris, Sr., Esq.; and it is with great pride that

75 we join the Honorary Committee in paying tribute to this most

76 effective and public-spirited organization whose advocacy for the

77 less fortunate among us is a matter of record:

78 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF  
79 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That

80 we do hereby recognize the 50th Anniversary Celebration of North

81 Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) and commend its mission

82 of advocacy.

83 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to

84 the Executive Director of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services

85 and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

