

By: Senator(s) Hopson, Blount, Horhn,  
Barnett, Bryan, Dearing, Frazier, Jackson  
(11th), Jackson (32nd), Kirby

To: Rules

## SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 589

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION EXTENDING THE RECOGNITION OF THE  
2 MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE TO MISSISSIPPI NATIVE DR. WILLIAM R.  
3 (BILL) FERRIS AS RECIPIENT OF TWO GRAMMY AWARDS FOR BEST  
4 HISTORICAL ALBUM.

5 WHEREAS, Historian and Mississippi native William Ferris took  
6 home two Grammy Awards on February 9, 2019, for a retrospective of  
7 his work as a Mississippi Folklorist; and

8 WHEREAS, *Voices of Mississippi*, Artists and Musicians  
9 documented by William R. Ferris, won the Grammy Award for "Best  
10 Historical Album." The 120-page book that accompanied the  
11 recordings also received a Grammy for "Best Album Notes." A box  
12 set, *Voices of Mississippi* contains two discs of Ferris's blues  
13 and gospel recordings from the 1960s and 1970s, one disc of  
14 recorded stories and a DVD of documentaries he made in the 1970s  
15 and early 1980s; and

16 WHEREAS, Ferris, who grew up on his family's Warren County  
17 farm, began recording local blues and gospel music as a teenager  
18 in the 1950s, using a clunky reel-to-reel tape recorder. What has  
19 compelled him to continue these recordings for six decades, he



20 said, "was following (his) heart." Ferris said gospel music had  
21 been a big part of his life since the age of four, when he started  
22 attending Sunday services at a local Black church with a woman  
23 named Mary Gordon. When he was older, he said, he noticed the  
24 church had no hymnals. If the singers weren't there, he said it  
25 was like the music "would disappear." So Ferris said he felt a  
26 personal responsibility to preserve those services. He began with  
27 audio recordings and photographs, later moving on to filming the  
28 services. This work with gospel music grew into recording blues  
29 singers and storytellers; and

30 WHEREAS, Dr. Ferris, an Associate Director of the Center for  
31 the Study of the American South at the University of North  
32 Carolina, Chapel Hill, has received a number of awards and  
33 accolades for his work with *Southern Folklore*, including a  
34 Pulitzer Prize nomination for co-editing the *Encyclopedia of*  
35 *Southern Culture*. In the 1980s, Quincy Jones tapped Ferris to  
36 help compose the score for the film "The Color Purple." Ferris  
37 has written and edited 10 books and created 15 documentary films,  
38 most of which deal with African-American music and folklore from  
39 the Mississippi Delta. A graduate of Davidson College and a  
40 former Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ferris  
41 also founded the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at The  
42 University of Mississippi, where he taught for 18 years; and

43 WHEREAS, in 2017, the Governor's Arts Award Program included  
44 William R. (Bill) Ferris for the Lifetime Achievement Award.



45 William R. Ferris has long been the preeminent scholar and  
46 documenter of Mississippi's rich culture, music and folklore.  
47 Born in Vicksburg in 1942, Dr. Ferris has been documenting the  
48 lives of Mississippians, often African-Americans, for more than 50  
49 years. He is the younger brother of the late Senator Grey Ferris;  
50 and

51 WHEREAS, *Voices of Mississippi* covers three decades of  
52 Ferris's work and, as a result, he said, connects the otherwise  
53 disparate voices of musicians, artists and storytellers he has  
54 worked with over the years. It is important because it connects  
55 the dots of black and white men and women, like Eudora Welty,  
56 Alice Walker, as well as B.B King and Parchman inmates. "It is a  
57 broad spectrum of voices who, when you listen to them have a rich,  
58 textured musical expression of language," Ferris said. He said  
59 the Grammy is important because it brings these voices to a wider  
60 audience. "It is the pinnacle of recognition for the field of  
61 music, and it is especially important that musicians from  
62 Mississippi, who represent the roots of American music, are being  
63 recognized by the Grammy Awards. It helps us understand that the  
64 roots of blues and rock "n" roll and gospel and country music are  
65 all in Mississippi; and

66 WHEREAS, it is with great pride that we pay tribute and  
67 express appreciation for the national recognition and  
68 contributions of a Mississippi civic and cultural leader who has



69 made Mississippi a better place and exemplifies the literary,  
70 artistic and cultural traditions of our great state:

71 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF  
72 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That  
73 we do hereby extend the recognition of the Mississippi Legislature  
74 to Dr. William R. (Bill) Ferris as recipient of two Grammy Awards  
75 for "Best Historical Album" and extend our congratulations on this  
76 auspicious occasion.

77 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to  
78 Bill Ferris and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

