

By: Senator(s) Wiggins, Barnett, Blackwell, Boyd, Branning, Caughman, Chassaniol, England, Fillingane, Hopson, Jackson (11th), Jackson (32nd), Kirby, Parker, Simmons (13th), Sparks, Witherspoon

To: Rules

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 17

1 A RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING PASCAGOULA NATIVE SARAH THOMAS FOR
2 MAKING HISTORY AS THE FIRST FEMALE REFEREE TO OFFICIATE A SUPER
3 BOWL.

4 WHEREAS, history was made during the February 7, 2021, Super
5 Bowl in Tampa, Florida, when Pascagoula native Sarah Thomas made
6 her debut as the NFL's first female referee to officiate a Super
7 Bowl. She served as a Line Judge in the Championship Game between
8 the Kansas City Chiefs and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers; and

9 WHEREAS, from Pascagoula to Raymond James Stadium in Tampa
10 Bay takes about eight hours by car but for NFL Official Sarah
11 Thomas and her family, it has been a much longer journey. "We
12 knew that she had determination and whatever was put before her,
13 she would conquer," said her mother, Donna Bailey. "Sarah has
14 always been the trailblazer," said Sarah's brother, Scott Bailey.
15 "Just get her the opportunity and she will show you what she can
16 do. She puts her time and effort into it and she has deserved
17 it." On the field and off, Sarah's family has always been her
18 support system in more ways than one. Her two brothers, Lea and



19 Scott, are also football officials. "I am so proud of my daughter
20 but I am also so proud of my two sons," said Sarah's father,
21 Spencer Bailey. "They are part of the reason she is where she is
22 and they encouraged her and supported her in all the ways brothers
23 can do." At the end of the day, Sarah and her family know she has
24 a job to do and they believe the skills that got her to the
25 biggest stage in football will carry her far beyond it; and

26 WHEREAS, Thomas began her officiating career in 1996, when
27 she attended a meeting of the Gulf Coast Football Officials
28 Association. She worked her first varsity high school game in
29 1999. In 2006, Gerry Austin, Conference USA's Coordinator of
30 Officials and a former NFL official, invited her to an official's
31 camp. Austin was impressed with her skills and hired her for the
32 Conference USA staff. In 2007, Sarah became the first woman to
33 officiate a major college football game, working a game between
34 Memphis and Jacksonville State. On November 12, 2011, Sarah
35 Thomas became the first woman to officiate in a Big Ten stadium,
36 working as a line judge when Northwestern hosted Rice; and

37 WHEREAS, during the 2009 season, Thomas was one of five
38 female officials in major college football and the only one at the
39 Football Bowl Subdivision level. She was assigned to a crew and
40 given a full schedule of 11 games. At the end of the season, she
41 was selected to work the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl between
42 Marshall and Ohio, making her the first woman to officiate a bowl
43 game. Thomas has officiated United Football League Games, and in



44 2010 worked the League Championship Game. In 2013, Thomas became
45 one of 21 finalists in contention for a permanent NFL officiating
46 position. Thomas worked New Orleans Saints scrimmages, and was
47 part of the NFL officiating development program; and

48 WHEREAS, on April 8, 2015, the NFL officially announced that
49 Thomas would become the first full-time female official in NFL
50 history, and was assigned to officiating Crew Head Referee Pet
51 Morelli. Thomas made her NFL regular season debut in a game
52 between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Houston Texans at NRG
53 Stadium on September 13, 2015. Thomas' NFL officiating uniform
54 number is 153; and

55 WHEREAS, "Football has played a very impactful role in my
56 life...It has enhanced the foundation that my parents have laid
57 before me, all those coaches have laid before me, and my ability
58 to just try to keep it together, problem solve, work as a team,
59 and also just be a part of a crew of officials," she said. "It
60 has taught me so much about life...I absolutely love officiating
61 football. It is the longevity of your career that you really want
62 to establish. Being granted the honor of working a Super Bowl
63 means that you finish top of your position." Throughout her
64 journey, rather than specifically dreaming about officiating the
65 Super Bowl, Thomas simply hoped to be the best at her job; and

66 WHEREAS, it is with great pride that we commend this
67 Mississippi citizen who is a pioneer in her field and has brought



68 honor to her family, her community and to the State of
69 Mississippi:

70 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
71 MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby recognize Sarah Thomas of Brandon,
72 Mississippi, for making history as the first female referee to
73 officiate a Super Bowl and as a pioneer in female football
74 officiating, and extend the best wishes of the Legislature to
75 Sarah and her family as her landmark career continues.

76 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
77 Sarah Thomas, forwarded to the NFL corporate office, and be made
78 available to the Capitol Press Corps.

