

By: Senator(s) Chassaniol, Blount

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 542

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION EXTENDING THE SINCEREST CONDOLENCES
2 OF THE LEGISLATURE ON THE PASSING OF RESPECTED HISTORIC
3 PRESERVATIONIST ELBERT RILEY HILLIARD, DIRECTOR EMERITUS OF THE
4 MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY, AND HONORING HIS
5 PUBLIC SERVICE.

6 WHEREAS, we join historic preservationists and students of
7 Mississippi History in mourning the passing of Elbert Riley
8 Hilliard, Director Emeritus of the Mississippi Department of
9 Archives and History (MDAH), on March 17, 2024; and

10 WHEREAS, Director Hilliard was an educator, historical
11 administrator, historic preservationist and dedicated public
12 servant who spent 39 years with the Mississippi Department of
13 Archives and History, and at the time of his retirement on
14 December 31, 2004, was the longest serving State Historic
15 Preservation Officer in the nation; and

16 WHEREAS, born February 8, 1937, at his Riley grandparents'
17 home in Lambert, Mississippi, Elbert attended school at Anguilla,
18 where he met his future wife, then Claire Nicols. They were
19 married in the Anguilla Methodist Church on August 3, 1958. In



20 1958, Elbert graduated from Delta State College with a Bachelor's
21 degree in Social Studies and Physical Education. Prior to
22 Elbert's receiving his M.A. degree in History in August 1959, he
23 and Claire accepted teaching positions in the Natchez-Adams County
24 School System. In June 1960, Claire and Elbert moved to Madison
25 to join the Madison County School System. Claire taught first
26 grade, and Elbert taught history courses and coached boys and
27 girls basketball, baseball, and girls track. Here, he earned the
28 esteem of his students and acquired his second lifetime nickname,
29 "Coach Hilliard"; and

30 WHEREAS, Elbert joined MDAH as the Curator of History and
31 Administrator of the Old Capitol Museum in July 1965, serving
32 under the tutelage of the renowned Charlotte Capers, MDAH's
33 beloved and highly respected third director. Elbert became the
34 first Director of the Division of Historic Sites and Archaeology
35 (now Historic Preservation) in 1970, and in that position
36 initiated and led the MDAH's participation in the National
37 Historic Preservation Program that was established by the U.S.
38 Congress enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act in
39 1966. He also oversaw the implementation of the State Antiquities
40 Law that has resulted in the preservation of innumerable
41 Mississippi Landmark properties and a recognition by citizens and
42 elected officials of the importance and economic impact of
43 historic preservation. Preservationists throughout the nation



44 have frequently noted that Mississippi's Antiquities Act is the
45 envy of other state historic preservation offices; and

46 WHEREAS, Director Hilliard became Director of MDAH in July
47 1973 and served in that capacity until his own retirement on
48 December 31, 2004. As MDAH Director, Elbert also served as
49 Mississippi's first State Historical Records Coordinator, as
50 Secretary-Treasurer of the Mississippi Historical Society (a
51 volunteer position that he continued to hold until March 2018),
52 and as a member of the Board of Editors of the Heritage of
53 Mississippi Series since its inception. He had the privilege of
54 working under the leadership and guidance of the Board of Trustees
55 President, William F. Winter, and the other members of the MDAH's
56 Nonpolitical Board. Elbert frequently mentioned how fortunate he
57 was in having the support of both the board and the talented and
58 dedicated staff members who were committed to the MDAH's mission
59 and public service; and

60 WHEREAS, during his tenure with MDAH, Elbert witnessed its
61 growth from small quarters in the north wing of the War Memorial
62 Building in 1965 to what is now the Charlotte Capers Building in
63 1971, and then to the new state-of-the-art William F. Winter
64 Building in 2003. He frequently noted that, due to the support of
65 the Mississippi Legislature and visionary citizens across the
66 state, MDAH has evolved into a comprehensive historical agency
67 that is responsible for duties and programs, which are
68 administered by two or more separate agencies in most states; and



69 WHEREAS, since its establishment in 1902, MDAH has only had
70 seven directors, and Elbert considered himself fortunate in having
71 known all of them except for the MDAH's first Director, Dunbar
72 Rowland. Katie Blount, current MDAH Director, noted Elbert's
73 unique impact when she said, "Elbert Hilliard led MDAH for 39
74 years during which MDAH grew into a multifaceted historical agency
75 with a national reputation for excellence. His work had a
76 profound impact on the effort to preserve, interpret, and promote
77 Mississippi history. He led with humility, compassion, and
78 wisdom, and those of us who served under him loved and admired him
79 for those qualities as well as his enormous impact on this agency
80 and the state"; and

81 WHEREAS, on the occasion of Elbert's retirement, the MDAH
82 Board of Trustees granted him Director Emeritus status, effective
83 January 1, 2005, and adopted a resolution honoring him for his
84 service "with honor, dedication, and great distinction for the
85 past 31 years." Citing a few of his countless contributions, the
86 board noted the growth of a multifaceted historical agency with a
87 national reputation for excellence; his overseeing 17 historic
88 properties, six of which are National Historic Landmarks; his
89 invaluable work with the Mississippi Legislature to strengthen and
90 clarify Mississippi's laws governing historic preservation, state
91 and local government records, and archival and library security.
92 Former Governor and Board President, William F. Winter said at
93 Elbert's retirement, "Elbert has helped make the department one of



94 the most stable in state government, one that doesn't change with
95 each administration"; and

96 WHEREAS, Governor Haley Barbour, presiding over Elbert's
97 retirement reception in the rotunda of the Old Capitol Museum,
98 proclaimed January 27, 2005, as "Elbert Hilliard Day." The
99 Mississippi House of Representatives and the Mississippi Senate
100 adopted concurrent resolutions "commending the legacy of public
101 service of Elbert R. Hilliard and congratulating him on the
102 occasion of his retirement after 39 remarkable years with the
103 Mississippi Department of Archives and History"; and

104 WHEREAS, in 2010, Governor Barbour presented Elbert the
105 Mississippi Medal of Service. At its annual meeting in 2017, the
106 Mississippi Historical Society presented its Lifetime Achievement
107 Award to Elbert for "his effective running of the day-to-day
108 business of the organization from 1973 to 2017." During his
109 service as MDAH Director, Elbert actively supported the
110 Mississippi Heritage Trust as well as the Mississippi Main Street
111 Association and encouraged mayors and local officials throughout
112 the state to request MDAH's assistance in identifying and
113 preserving the important cultural resources in their respective
114 communities; and

115 WHEREAS, through the years, Elbert remembered the influence
116 that Delta State had on his life. In May 2005, he received the
117 first Honorary Doctorate to be awarded by Delta State University



118 and in 2007, Elbert was named to the university's Alumni Hall of
119 Fame; and

120 WHEREAS, a lifelong Methodist, Elbert was a longtime faithful
121 member of the Madison United Methodist Church, teaching youth and
122 adult Sunday School classes, serving for many years on the
123 church's Administrative Council, the Building Committee for the
124 new sanctuary, the Stained-Glass Window Committee, and as the
125 Church Historian. In 2009, he received the Mississippi
126 Conference's Tobias Gibson Award for his significant contributions
127 to the preservation of Methodist history. From 2005 to 2015, he
128 served as Chair of the Pearl River Church Historic Council that
129 coordinates the Annual Lambuth Day Ceremony and oversees the
130 preservation of the historic Pearl River Church that has been
131 designated a World Heritage Landmark by the United Methodist
132 General Conference Commission on Archives and History; and

133 WHEREAS, we pay tribute and cherish fondly the memory of this
134 most public-spirited citizen of the State of Mississippi whose
135 enormous civic energy is a wonderful example for public servants
136 and who leaves a legacy of leadership and dedication to the state
137 he loved:

138 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
139 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
140 we do hereby extend the sincerest condolences of the Legislature
141 on the passing of respected historic preservationist Elbert Riley
142 Hilliard, Director Emeritus of the Mississippi Department of



143 Archives and History, honor his public service, and for this and
144 for a lifetime of selfless service, a grateful state thanks him.

145 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
146 the surviving family of Elbert Hilliard, forwarded to the Director
147 and Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives
148 and History and the President of Delta State University, and be
149 made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

