

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 174

BY SENATORS PETERSON, MURRAY, MORRELL, DORSEY-COLOMB, BROWN,
BROOME, GALLOT, WARD, GARY SMITH, LAFLEUR, AMEDEE,
HEITMEIER, TARVER AND GUILLORY

A RESOLUTION

To commend Justice Bernette J. Johnson of the Louisiana Supreme Court on her ascension
in the legal field and for her outstanding contributions to both the legal field and her
fellow man.

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson attended Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia, on an
academic scholarship, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree; and received an
Honorary Doctorate in Law from Spellman College at commencement services in April,
2001; and

WHEREAS, she was one of the first African American women to attend the Law
School at Louisiana State University ("LSU"), where she received her Juris Doctorate degree
in 1969; and

WHEREAS, while a law student at LSU, Justice Johnson worked summers for the
Legal Defense Fund ("LDF") and as a law intern with the U.S. Department of Justice (Civil
Rights Division) in Washington, D.C., on cases filed by the department to implement the
1964 Civil Rights Act primarily dealing with discrimination in public accommodations; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also served as a federal observer during elections in
Greenwood, Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, after receiving her Juris Doctorate Degree from Louisiana State
University Law School, Justice Johnson became the managing attorney with the New
Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation, where she delivered legal services to over three
thousand clients in socio-economically deprived neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, prior to her election to the bench, Justice Johnson spent much of her
legal career working in the public sector including time as a legal services attorney, a Deputy
City Attorney for the city of New Orleans, and as a law intern with the U.S. Justice
Department, Civil Rights Division; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also worked as a community organizer with the
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in New York City and with community

groups in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana, disseminating information about recent school desegregation decisions, and encouraging parents to take advantage of newly desegregated schools; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also helped to organize household workers, so they would receive social security benefits and a minimum wage; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson's judicial career began in 1984, when she was elected to the Civil District Court of New Orleans, and was the first woman to hold that office, and was re-elected, without opposition, in 1990 and was elected Chief Judge by her colleagues in 1994; and

WHEREAS, as a civil trial judge, she was first assigned to Domestic Relations Court, where she established a system to refer custody, alimony, and child support issues to mediation conducted by certified social workers of the Children's Bureau and Family Services, prior to court appearances and provided that such mediation be provided to needy families based on a sliding scale system for payment of fees; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson was elected to serve on the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1994, and was re-elected, without opposition, in 2000; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson serves on the Louisiana Supreme Court's Judicial Council, has served on the Court's Legal Services Task Force, has served on the National Campaign on Best Practices in the area of Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Court, and has worked closely with the Court's Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Committee and the Committee on Bar Admissions; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson provided extraordinary leadership to the Louisiana Judiciary in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by facilitating the efforts to restore the operations of all courts in the New Orleans area; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure on the Louisiana Supreme Court, Justice Johnson diversified the Committee on Bar Admissions by increasing minority participation and leadership on that committee; and

WHEREAS, when Chief Justice Kimball suffered a stroke in January, 2010, Justice Johnson, as Deputy Chief Justice and the court's second most senior Justice, assumed the leadership of the court including serving as chair of the court's conferences and presiding

over oral argument before the court; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson continued in this leadership role as acting Chief Justice until Chief Justice Kimball's health allowed her to return to the court; and

WHEREAS, upon Justice Kimball's retirement in January, 2013, Justice Johnson will be the judge oldest in point of service on the Supreme Court and will therefore ascend to the position of Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court – a natural ascension given the trajectory of her service to the public, the judiciary, and the Louisiana Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson will become the first African American Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court and is currently the court's appointee to the Louisiana Law Institute; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson organized the first Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program for the Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, was chair of the CLE Committee and was given the Martinet's President Award in 1997 and 2008; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson is active in prison outreach, beginning with hosting a group visit to the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (St. Gabriel Women's Prison) in 2008 where the goal of the visit was to learn more about rehabilitation programs already in place and to offer help and resources in sustaining and improving such programs.

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson is currently spearheading prison re-entry initiatives at St. Gabriel Women's Prison and has created an outreach program to help women inmates who are within a year of release with re-entry priorities; and

WHEREAS, the outreach program assists the women with obtaining housing, job readiness, employment, and obtaining other necessary services and benefits to insure against recidivism; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson is a Fleur De Lis member of the New Orleans Bar Association, is active with several committees of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), and was presented with the LSBA President's award in 2005 for her work as co-chair of the Diversity Committee; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, she chaired the National Bar Association Judicial Council, where she also served a term as secretary and is currently a member of the A.P. Tureaud Inn of Court, the Louisiana State Law Institute; the National Association of Women Judges,

serving as a district director, and is now active with the Women in Prison Project; and

WHEREAS, in 1996, Justice Johnson's portrait was unveiled as she was inducted into the LSU Law Center Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure as judge, Justice Johnson has been the recipient of numerous awards including the 2008 Distinguished Jurist Award presented by the Louisiana Bar Foundation, the Louisiana Bar Association President's Award for Exceptional Service as co-chair of the Task Force on Diversity in the Profession, the Louis A. Martinet Legal Society President's Award in 1997 and 2008, the National Nobel Woman Award presented by the Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women, and the Judicial Public Service Award presented by the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles Mystic Shrine of North and South America; and

WHEREAS, in addition, other awards include: the 2000 Medal of Honor presented by the Mayor of the City of New Orleans; the 2000 Women of Wonder Award presented by the National Council of Negro Women; the first Ernest N. Morial Award presented by the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation; the A.P. Tureaud Citizenship Award presented by the Louisiana State Conference of the NAACP; the 1999 Martin Luther King Jr. Torch Bearer Award; the 1998 Outstanding Community Service Award presented by the Imperial Court Daughters of Isis; the 1998 Outstanding Service Award presented by the International Law Section of the National Bar Association; and the 1992 Role Model Award presented by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Greater New Orleans; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson is the proud parent of two industrious and conscientious adult children: a son, David, an accountant, who lives in Atlanta with his family; and a daughter, Rachael, who is an attorney licensed to practice law in Florida and Louisiana.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend Justice Bernette J. Johnson of the Louisiana Supreme Court on her ascension in the legal field and for her outstanding contributions to both the legal field and her fellow man, and extends to her best wishes for continued success and happiness in all future endeavors.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE