

SENATE BILL 2636

By Norris

AN ACT relative to the creation of a planning commission for the celebration of the life of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. This act makes appropriations for the planning commission for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017.

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was an extraordinary man whose uncompromising spiritual and moral values, courage, compassion, dignity, humility, love, and service to his fellow man galvanized this nation towards justice and racial harmony; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was the symbolic leader of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, a pastor, an orator, Nobel Laureate, and humanitarian who dedicated his life to ensuring equality and justice for all; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, during a time of heightened racial discrimination and segregation under Jim Crow laws. Despite this adversity, he excelled in his studies and eventually went on to obtain his doctorate in theology and served throughout his lifetime as a pastor and spiritual leader; and

WHEREAS, drawing inspiration from his faith, Dr. King set out on a path to guide African Americans to achieve legal equality in the United States through peaceful protest and nonviolent resistance; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was a primary leader of the successful Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott in 1955, which sought desegregation of the public buses in the South; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, and served as its first president; and

WHEREAS, in 1963, Dr. King helped organize nonviolent protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that drew national attention to the struggle for civil rights and to the hateful and brutal responses of the local law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, in 1963, in his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. King wrote that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King helped organize the 1963 March on Washington during which he delivered his eloquent and moving "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, in which he said, "I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his work toward passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and for combating racial inequality through insistent use of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King helped to organize the monumentally inspiring Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965, which assisted in advocating for passage of the Voting Rights Act that year to guarantee all African-American citizens the right to vote; and

WHEREAS, in 1966, Dr. King and the SCLC continued working for social change and justice by fighting poor housing conditions in Chicago, Illinois, as well as de facto segregation in education and employment; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, Dr. King was supporting the sanitation workers in Memphis in response to the city's pattern of neglect and abuse of its African-American employees, and was planning a national occupation of Washington, D.C., to be called the "Poor People's Campaign," when he was assassinated at a Memphis hotel on April 4, 1968; and

WHEREAS, speaking to a group of striking sanitation workers in Memphis the night before his assassination, Dr. King said, "We've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the

end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through."; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, numerous cities and states began to establish Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a holiday. Legislation for a national Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was signed into law by President Ronald Wilson Reagan on November 2, 1983, and the first national observation of the holiday was on January 20, 1986; and

WHEREAS, today, in honor of Dr. King's life and legacy, we recommit ourselves to the elimination of prejudice and intolerance in our society, and hereby create a planning commission to establish and organize a schedule of events to take place during calendar year 2018 for the purpose of celebrating and honoring the life, legacy, and accomplishments of Dr. King, fifty years after his tragic death; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1.

(a) There is created a planning commission, hereinafter called the "commission," to plan for a celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The commission consists of the following members:

- (1) The governor;
- (2) The speakers of the senate and house of representatives;
- (3) The commissioner of tourist development;
- (4) The commissioner of education;
- (5) The commissioner of economic and community development;
- (6) The commissioner of health;

(7) One (1) member from each of the following standing committees of the general assembly to be selected by the respective committee:

(A) The state and local government committee of the senate;

(B) The state government committee of the house of representatives;

(C) The local government committee of the house of representatives;

(D) The education committee of the senate; and

(E) The education administration and planning committee of the house of representatives;

(8) The curator of the National Civil Rights Museum or the curator's designee;

(9) A retired faculty member who specialized in African American Rhetoric and Interracial Communication and who was the director of African American Studies in the University College at the University of Memphis, selected by the board of trustees of the University of Memphis;

(10) The curator of the Tennessee state museum or the curator's designee;

(11) One (1) member of the Tennessee historical commission selected by the historical commission;

(12) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Tennessee chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People;

(13) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee;

(14) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference;

(15) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Southern Poverty Law Center;

(16) One (1) member from each of the following university systems to be selected by the respective governing boards of the systems:

(A) The University of Tennessee system;

(B) Vanderbilt University; and

(C) Tennessee State University;

(17) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Rainbow PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) Coalition;

(18) One (1) member from a Greek letter collegiate fraternity and one (1) member from a Greek letter collegiate sorority selected by the governing body of the National Pan-Hellenic Council;

(19) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and

(20) One (1) member selected by the governing body of the Church of God in Christ.

(b) The governor shall call the first meeting of the commission. At its first meeting, the commission shall elect from among its members a chair, a vice chair, a treasurer, and a secretary. The commission shall adopt rules and procedures to govern its proceedings, and the secretary shall keep a permanent and accurate record of all of its proceedings.

(c) After its first meeting, the commission shall meet at the call of the chair or at the call of a majority of its members.

(d) A majority of the members of the commission constitutes a quorum for the purpose of meeting and conducting business.

(e) All members of the commission serve without compensation, but are eligible for reimbursement for travel expenses in accordance with the comprehensive travel regulations promulgated by the department of finance and administration and approved by the attorney general and reporter.

(f) The commission shall:

(1) Establish a schedule and event calendar for calendar year 2018 to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in each grand division of this state;

(2) Consult with and enter into cooperative working agreements with local governments for purposes of scheduling, planning, and coordinating events under this subsection (f);

(3) Accept gifts, bequests, grants, and other payments, public or private, to finance its activities;

(4) Cooperate with community, professional, civic, religious, and nonprofit organizations and federal and state agencies in furtherance of its duties and objectives under this subsection (f); and

(5) Contact other state legislatures and agencies to encourage participation in the events scheduled by the commission.

(g) The executive branch departments with representation on the commission shall provide administrative and technical support to the commission in furtherance of its duties and objectives.

(h) The commission will be dissolved on July 1, 2018. All members of the commission shall serve until the dissolution of the commission in accordance with this subsection (h).

(i) Vacancies must be filled in the same manner as the vacating member's position was originally filled.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.