

1 SR68
2 176087-1
3 By Senator Smitherman
4 RFD:
5 First Read: 22-MAR-16

8 URGING CONGRESS TO ENACT LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH
9 THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIL RIGHTS DISTRICT AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC
10 PARK AS PART OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.
11

12 WHEREAS, the Birmingham Civil Rights district is an
13 area of downtown Birmingham where many significant events in
14 the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s took
15 place; and

16 WHEREAS, many sites in this area are listed on the
17 National Register of Historic Places, including the A.G.
18 Gaston Motel, Kelly Ingram Park, 16th Street Baptist Church,
19 Bethel Baptist Church, the 4th Avenue Historic District, and
20 the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute; and

21 WHEREAS, despite some change in the early 1950s, in
22 the 1960s, Birmingham was regarded as one of the most
23 segregated cities in the South, including its parks, pools,
24 playgrounds, hotels, theaters, elevators, public housing, and
25 employment and with segregation remaining firmly in place and
26 violence, including some 60 bombings from 1945 to 1963, was
27 frequently used to maintain the status quo; and

1 WHEREAS, in 1963, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth
2 requested that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
3 (SCLC) make the City of Birmingham the epicenter for an
4 ambitious new Civil Rights campaign; "Project C," Project
5 Confrontation, was designed to eliminate segregation through
6 mass protests, marches, and sit-ins; and

7 WHEREAS, the historic A.G. Gaston Motel was
8 headquarters for Project C, a campaign that began on April 6,
9 1963, when police arrested 45 protestors who marched from the
10 A.G. Gaston Motel to downtown Birmingham; and

11 WHEREAS, phase two of Project C began in May of
12 1963, with a series of mass protests in which 900 Black youth
13 were arrested by police, overwhelming the capacity of the
14 city's jails; and

15 WHEREAS, in May 1963, youth protestors in Kelly
16 Ingram Park were violently dispersed by police dogs and
17 powerful water cannons; images of the brutal attack spread
18 across the country, shocking the conscience of the nation and
19 the world and forcing the Birmingham business community and
20 local leaders to agree to release the peaceful protestors,
21 integrate lunch counters, and begin hiring African Americans;
22 and

23 WHEREAS, the September 15, 1963, bombing of the 16th
24 Street Baptist Church violently killed Addie Mae Collins,
25 Carole Robinson, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair, and
26 injured 22 other church members and left significant damage to
27 the church; and

1 WHEREAS, located just south of 16th Street Baptist
2 Church is the 4th Avenue Historic District, the center for
3 Black-owned businesses which served Black customers during the
4 city's long period of enforced segregation; and

5 WHEREAS, also located in Birmingham is Bethel
6 Baptist Church which was led by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth;
7 Bethel served as the headquarters for the Alabama Christian
8 Movement for Human Rights from 1956 to 1961 and was a place of
9 refuge for displaced and injured members of the 1961 Freedom
10 Ride, and the target of multiple bombings in the 1950s and
11 1960s; and

12 WHEREAS, Bethel Baptist Church, as well as many
13 other Birmingham churches, such as the New Pilgrim Baptist
14 Church, hosted mass meetings leading up to many of the civil
15 rights marches throughout the city; and

16 WHEREAS, the students and faculty of Miles College,
17 a historically Black college in the Birmingham area,
18 supplemented the efforts of the local churches; and

19 WHEREAS, decades after the Civil Rights Movement,
20 the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute opened its doors in
21 1992; the institute stands at the center of the civil rights
22 historic district, acting as a hub for children, students,
23 adults, and scholars who come to Birmingham to learn about the
24 American Civil Rights Movement; and

25 WHEREAS, the 27,000 square foot permanent gallery
26 within the institute takes its visitors back to the 1950s when
27 Birmingham was deeply segregated; it serves more than 140,000

1 individuals each year, encouraging new generations to examine
2 our country's civil rights history, as well as issues such as
3 equality and justice; and

4 WHEREAS, the preservation, historic interpretation,
5 and management of the Birmingham Civil Rights District, truly
6 a national civil rights historic treasure, will require the
7 collaboration of federal and municipal entities, as well as
8 community organizations to establish the district as a
9 national historic park; now therefore,

10 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE LEGISLATURE OF
11 ALABAMA, That we urge Congress to enact legislation to
12 establish the Birmingham Civil Rights District as a National
13 Historic Park as part of the National Park System.

14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this
15 resolution be provided to the members of the Alabama
16 Congressional delegation for further distribution to the
17 members of Congress as an indication of our strong support for
18 the action urged by this resolution.