

By: Senator S. Flowers

SENATE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THE LIFE, LEGACY, AND IMPACT OF
THE HONORABLE L. CLIFFORD DAVIS.

Subtitle

TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THE LIFE, LEGACY,
AND IMPACT OF THE HONORABLE L. CLIFFORD
DAVIS.

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis, formerly of Arlington, Texas, passed away on February 15, 2025, at the age of one hundred (100) years; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was born on October 12, 1924, in Wilton, Arkansas, to Augustus and Dora Davis, who owned a small farm and rented additional land to cultivate and taught their children Christian values, an entrepreneurial mindset, and self-sufficiency; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis's parents cared so much about education that, because of restrictions on secondary education for Black Arkansans in Little River County at that time, the family rented a home in Little Rock, Arkansas, so that the children could attend high school there under the supervision of their aunt, and Davis ultimately graduated from Dunbar High School; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis graduated from what was then Philander Smith College in May 1945 with his bachelor's degree, and he attended the illustrious Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C., during the 1945-1946 school year, then attended Atlanta University to study



economics during 1946-1947 while he sought admission to the more affordable University of Arkansas School of Law; and

WHEREAS, at that time, the University of Arkansas School of Law used racially discriminatory practices to consider admitting Black students and while the school admitted the Honorable L. Clifford Davis, they required him to keep to different financial requisites and separate instruction practices compared with white students, so he declined the offer yet simultaneously cracked open the door for admission of Blacks to the university's various professional schools without court litigation; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis returned to Howard University School of Law in the fall of 1947, graduated in June 1949, was admitted to the bar in Arkansas in July 1949, and started his legal practice the next month in Pine Bluff, focusing his early career, under the tutelage of attorney Harold Flowers in Pine Bluff, on civil rights and desegregation litigation; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis assisted future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with the landmark 1954 desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); and

WHEREAS, in 1952, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis moved to Texas and taught business courses at Paul Quinn College in Waco while establishing residency in Texas to take the Texas bar exam, and he was admitted to the bar in Texas in 1953, moving to Fort Worth to practice in 1954; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis opened the first solo practice for a Black lawyer in the historic downtown Ninth Street business district in Fort Worth as a branch office partnered with Dallas legal trailblazers C.B. Bunkley and Louis A. Bedford; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis's preeminent mark on North Texas was in the pursuit of equality, as he played a pivotal role in desegregating the public schools of Mansfield and Fort Worth Independent

School Districts, an accomplishment later recognized when a local elementary school was named in his honor in 2002; and

WHEREAS, in 1977, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis and thirteen (13) other local attorneys formed the Fort Worth Black Bar Association, which later became the Tarrant County Black Bar Association and then the L. Clifford Davis Legal Association; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was elected as the first Black judge of a state district court in Tarrant County in 1984 and he served two (2) decades as a district judge, including service as a Senior Visiting Judge before his retirement; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was an active advocate for civil rights in Arkansas and Texas, not only working for integration in the public schools but also expanding opportunities for jobs, voting rights, the holding of public office, and housing for minorities while promoting civic responsibility for the greater good among minority populations; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame along with the Little Rock Nine; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis maintained a lifetime membership in Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., for over seventy (70) years and achieved the pinnacle of Freemasonry as a 33rd Degree Mason; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, when the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was ninety-two (92) years of age, the University of Arkansas School of Law granted him an honorary doctorate in place of the one he was denied via racial discrimination in 1949; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis garnered dozens of legal, civic, and community service awards during his life and career, including the National Bar Association's Hall of Fame award, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Robert Ming award, the Tarrant County Bar Association's Silver Gavel and Blackstone awards, the Rally for Education,

Inc., Mentor award, and the Anti-Defamation League of North Texas's Trailblazer award, and the Tarrant County Commissioner designated "Judge L. Clifford Davis Day"; and

WHEREAS, as he approached one hundred (100) years of age, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was inducted as a Texas Legal Legend and was honored with the Dallas Bar Association's Legacy award, and he was named a Living Legend by the Black Academy of Arts and Letters of Dallas and the Tarrant County Black Historical and Genealogical Society, and this was also a time when many feature stories about his legendary life and career appeared in preeminent Texas newspapers and magazines; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable L. Clifford Davis was married to his beautiful, dear wife Ethel R. Weaver Davis for fifty-nine (59) years, and to this union two (2) daughters, Avis and Karen, were born; and

WHEREAS, upon the passing of the Honorable L. Clifford Davis, a statement issued by his alma mater Philander Smith University, from which he received a Distinguished Alumni award, said, "Philander Smith University honors the life and legacy of Judge L. Clifford Davis, [class of] [19]45, a distinguished alumnus, civil rights attorney, trailblazing jurist, and a 2007 Arkansas Black Hall of Fame inductee. A fierce advocate for human rights and justice, Judge Davis dedicated his career to dismantling barriers and paving the way for future generations . . . He blazed a trail as an influential attorney and judge who helped shape the legal landscape in Arkansas and Texas, particularly in the fight for civil rights and equal access to education . . . In October 2024, Judge Davis celebrated his 100th birthday[,], a reflection of a life well-lived in service to justice and equality"; and

WHEREAS, Senator Stephanie Flowers said of the Honorable L. Clifford Davis, "Judge Davis was a born leader, an intelligent member of the bench, a committed public servant, and a focused leader whose wisdom and courage touched everyone he encountered on his personal and professional paths. Judge Davis first practiced law in Arkansas with my father, the Honorable William Harold Flowers. Judge Davis demonstrated tremendous perseverance and positive influence throughout his [one hundred] years, four months, and three days of

life on this earth. A giant of a man who worked for the protection and general welfare of others, Judge Davis persevered to fulfill God's charge for his life. He helped change the trajectory of history and made a difference in everything he touched. He will be greatly missed. Although his earthly appointment has come to a close, I know for certain his legacy will continue to make an impact in the years to come",

NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the Senate remember and honor the life, legacy, and impact of the Honorable L. Clifford Davis.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT upon adoption, a copy of this resolution be presented to the family of the Honorable L. Clifford Davis by the Secretary of the Senate.