

LAW, JUSTICE, AND ETHICS (LJE)

Resolution LJE-22-37

CORRECTING AN INJUSTICE AGAINST DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. walked into the heart of Jim Crow demanding change from those intransigents in their hatred, and his courage was unquestioned, his method of nonviolence risky, and his unapologetic style;

WHEREAS, at 34 years of age, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. received international recognition with the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize;

WHEREAS, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) immorally recorded the life and conversations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;

WHEREAS, the FBI began monitoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in December 1955 during his involvement with the Montgomery bus boycott, and engaged in covert operations against him throughout the 1960s;

WHEREAS, for the last four and one-half years of his life, from November 1963 until his death in April 1968, Dr. King lived without any semblance of privacy, and his hotel rooms were bugged, his phones tapped, and his office and inner circle infiltrated by informants;

WHEREAS, on November 21, 1964, the FBI anonymously sent Dr. King a letter encouraging Dr. King to commit suicide to avoid public embarrassment;

WHEREAS, according to a United States Senate Committee convened in the 1970s to investigate the FBI's domestic intelligence operations, when Dr. King condemned the Vietnam War in a speech at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, the FBI interpreted this position as proof he "has been influenced by Communist advisors" and stepped up their covert operations against him;

WHEREAS, in August 1967, the FBI created a Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) which targeted Dr. King, the Black Panther Party, and other civil rights leaders;

WHEREAS, the FBI's surveillance tapes and the transcripts of them remain under seal until 2027; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is critical to memorializing the Black experience in America, and his mission, and unfortunately, the challenges he confronted, remain timeless, and no one has the right to feed on his legacy.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators urges the National Archives and Records Administration to destroy the FBI surveillance tapes that were obtained immorally on Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges the Congress of the United States to work with President Joseph R. Biden to prevent similar abuses of power from being perpetrated for immoral and defamatory reasons; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

SPONSOR: Senator Stephen Bradford (CA)

Committee of Jurisdiction: Law, Justice, and Ethics (LJE) Policy Committee

Ratified in Plenary Session: December 2, 2021

Ratification certified by: Representative Billy Mitchell (GA), NBCSL President