



Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, TN

Legislation Text

File #: RS2024-380, **Version:** 1

A resolution recognizing the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. for his leading role in the civil rights movement in Nashville and Davidson County and his decades for work promoting non-violence and equality.

WHEREAS, the Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr., has spent a lifetime teaching non-violent direct action, organizing and engaging in civil rights efforts, and advocating for equality across the country; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Lawson trained in Ghandi's use of nonviolence to achieve social and political change while living in India as a missionary in the 1950s; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Lawson moved to Nashville to enroll in Vanderbilt University's Divinity School in 1957 after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged him to move to the American South to teach non-violence on a larger scale; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Lawson organized workshops and taught the methods and ideals of non-violent direct action to community members and university students in Nashville, including Diane Nash, John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, the Rev. C.T. Vivian, and Ernest "Rip" Patton; and

WHEREAS, the Nashville Student Movement soon conducted lunch counter sit-ins at various downtown Nashville stores in 1960, which led to heated backlash, violence, and more than 150 arrests of the student demonstrators; and

WHEREAS, as the sit-ins accelerated in Nashville, Rev. Lawson's role with the Nashville Student Movement led to his expulsion from the Vanderbilt Divinity School, an action for which the university later apologized and conceded was wrong; and

WHEREAS, on April 19, 1960, after the bombing of attorney Z. Alexander Looby's home, the Nashville Student Movement and Rev. Lawson marched in protest to the Nashville Courthouse and confronted Nashville Mayor Ben West, who conceded that segregation was wrong and that lunch counters in the city should be desegregated; and

WHEREAS, thanks to Rev. Lawson's work, Nashville became the first major Southern city to begin desegregating its public facilities; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Lawson's efforts continued well after Nashville lunch counters were desegregated, including continued desegregation protests in Nashville and across the country, early involvement with the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, organizing and participating in the Freedom Rides in 1961, and decades of ministry at Methodist churches in Tennessee and California; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Board of Education recognized Rev. Lawson by naming a new Bellevue high school in his honor, and James Lawson High School opened in the fall of 2023; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting and proper that the Metropolitan Council recognize Rev. Lawson for his life's work promoting civil rights and non-violence.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF

NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan Council hereby goes on record as recognizing the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. for his role in the Nashville sit-in movement and his decades of work promoting civil rights and non-violence.

Section 2. This Resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.