

# HOUSE RESOLUTION NO.103

Reps. Chatfield, Gay-Dagnogo, Hoadley, Wittenberg, Yancey, Ellison, Byrd, Garrett, Cynthia Johnson, Sneller, Neeley, Tyrone Carter, Kuppa, Love, LaGrand, Brenda Carter, Sowerby, Cherry, Rabhi, Stone, Hertel, Hope, Koleszar, Pohutsky, Camilleri, Guerra, Hammoud, Manoogian, Cambensy, Pagan, Whitsett, Tate, Garza, Hood, Greig, Witwer, Jones, Robinson, Bollin, Chirkun, Clemente, Crawford, Haadsma, Lasinski, Sabo, Shannon and Warren offered the following resolution:

- 1       A resolution to honor the life of Judge Damon J. Keith.
- 2       Whereas, Damon J. Keith dedicated his illustrious life and
- 3 career to public service and justice. Born in the city of Detroit
- 4 on July 4, 1922, the grandson of slaves, Judge Keith graduated from
- 5 West Virginia State College in 1943 and was drafted into the United
- 6 States Army. His experiences in his segregated unit served as the



1 impetus for what would become a life dedicated to the pursuit of  
2 justice and civil rights in America. After his military duty, he  
3 sought and earned his law degree from Howard University in 1949  
4 where he studied under future United States Supreme Court Justice  
5 Thurgood Marshall. He later earned a Master of Laws degree from  
6 Wayne State University in 1956; and

7       Whereas, Judge Keith began his career in private practice,  
8 opening one of Detroit's first African-American law firms in 1964.  
9 He quickly became drawn to public service and civic activism,  
10 displaying a strong commitment toward helping address racial  
11 discrimination, especially in the housing arena, in his beloved  
12 community. He served as president of the Detroit Housing Commission  
13 and was later appointed by Governor George Romney to serve as the  
14 Chair of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission; and

15       Whereas, On September 25, 1967, Judge Keith was nominated by  
16 President Lyndon B. Johnson and two weeks later was confirmed by  
17 the U.S. Senate to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern  
18 Division, later becoming the court's chief judge. On September 28,  
19 1977, Judge Keith was nominated by President Jimmy Carter and  
20 confirmed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. For  
21 more than fifty years, he served on the federal bench as a  
22 dedicated and persistent champion for equality for everyone in the  
23 American jurisprudence system; and

24       Whereas, During Judge Keith's distinguished tenure on the  
25 bench, he decided some of this country's most divisive issues,  
26 courageously standing up against school segregation, governmental  
27 surveillance of citizens, discriminatory and hostile work  
28 environments fueled by sexual harassment; housing discrimination;  
29 efforts to limit African-American voting; bad corporate actors that

engaged in racial discrimination; and secret hearings to deport hundreds of immigrants deemed suspicious; and

Whereas, We will eternally be guided by the oft-quoted words he penned in one of those cases, "Democracies die behind closed doors. . . . When government begins closing doors, it selectively controls information rightfully belonging to the people. Selective information is misinformation"; and

Whereas, Beyond the bench, Judge Keith received countless awards and accolades throughout his life, among them 40 honorary doctorate degrees and the prestigious federal judiciary's Edward J. Devitt Award. He was committed to numerous community activities, including the YMCA, Boy Scouts, UNCF, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Detroit Arts Commission, Interlochen Arts Academy, Sigma Phi Pi (Boule) and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated; and

Whereas, Judge Keith was loved by his friends and family, respected by his colleagues, and admired by the many law clerks whom he mentored and whose legal minds he helped to shape. He is survived by his daughters, Debbie, Cecile and Gilda, two granddaughters, and other relatives; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives, That the members of this legislative body honor the life of Judge Damon Keith. He was brilliant man, a legal titan, and a tremendous crusader for civil rights. His admirable legacy of courage, boldness, and determination will long continue to enrich our state and nation; and be it further

Resolved, That a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the family of Damon Keith as a token of our esteem and an expression of our highest tribute.