

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 and Robinson 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
- 7 impetus for what would become a life dedicated to the pursuit of
- 8 justice and civil rights in America. After his military duty, he



1 sought and earned his law degree from Howard University in 1949
2 where he studied under future United States Supreme Court Justice
3 Thurgood Marshall. He later earned a Master of Laws degree from
4 Wayne State University in 1956; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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