



BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Economic and Community Development

Bill: 21-0108

**City Property - Renaming James Mosher Elementary School to
Billie Holiday Elementary School**

Sponsor: Councilmember Bullock

Introduced: July 19, 2021

Purpose:

For the purpose of changing the name of James Mosher Elementary School, located at 2400 Mosher Street, to Billie Holiday Elementary School.

Effective: The 30th day after the date it is enacted

Agency Reports

City Solicitor	Favorable
Planning Commission	Opposed
Department of Transportation	No Objection
Department of Real Estate	No Objection
Baltimore Development Corporation	
Baltimore City Public Schools	Comments
Department of Finance	

Analysis

Current Law

Article 5 – Finance, Property, and Procurement; Section 20-2. Baltimore City Code (Edition 2000).

In general, City property shall be named or renamed by an ordinance of the Mayor and City Council. When a bill is introduced it must be referred to the Planning Commission; the municipal agency that has or will have control over the City property; the Department of Real Estate; and any other agency that may have an interest in naming the City property. (City Code, 1976/83, art. 1, §229(b), (c).) (Ord. 89-268.)

Background

Bill 21-0108 proposes to change the name of James Mosher Elementary School to Billie Holiday Elementary School. The school is located at 2400 Mosher Street in the Bridgeview/Greenlawn community of west Baltimore.

The original James Mosher building was built in 1933 at 22,000 square feet. An addition was made in 1955 of 47,252 sf bringing the total to 69,252 sf. A major renovation was done in 2002. The school currently has approximately 211 students enrolled. The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted on January 12, 2021, to close Alexander Hamilton and merge with James Mosher and Calverton at the end of the current school year in summer 2021. The make-up of the student body is approximately 98% African American, 1% White, 1% Hispanic.

Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) conducted their renaming process in accordance with Baltimore City Public Schools' Naming/Renaming School Facility Regulation (FFA-RA), which included engagement of school leaders, students, teachers, elected officials as well as community organizations and groups, and interested citizens. In the final selection process there were 417 votes. The final name, Billie Holiday Elementary School, was approved by the Board of School Commissioners on April 13, 2021. BCPS submitted Bill 21-0108 to the City Council for approval.

Eleanora Fagan, professionally known as Billie Holiday although born in Philadelphia and as a child was cared for in Baltimore by a relative. Billie Holiday is well known for her vocal abilities and influence on jazz music and pop singing. She was one of the first African American women to work with a white orchestra.

She is also known for her outstanding and unprecedented advocacy against lynchings in America, specifically via her musical rendition of the song “Strange Fruit” written by a Jewish schoolteacher, Abel Meeropol (pseudonym Lewis Allan) in 1937. The anti-lynching song conveyed the horrors suffered by African-Americans across the country. The song was used in some circles as a political tool to address lynching. In spite of being banned by certain producers from performing the song in certain music venues, Ms. Holiday continued to advocate against terrorism, racism and lynching by singing the song.

Ms. Holiday became the target of a drug investigation by the United States Treasury Department’s Federal Bureau of Narcotics, as her drug addiction was well known. She served time in prison and died in 1959 from cirrhosis.

Baltimore City honored Billie Holiday with a statue on Pennsylvania Avenue in 1985. The United States Postal Service honored her by introducing a USPS-sponsored stamp. She won many awards posthumously:

- 2021 Grammy Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1987 Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award
- 1992 Grammy Best Historical Album – Billie Holiday – “The Complete Decca”
- 1999 Time Magazine Declares “Strange Fruit” the Song of the Century
- 2000 Grammy Hall of Fame – “Lady in Satin Album”
- 2002 Grammy Award for Best Historical Album – “Lady Day: The Complete Billie Holiday”
- 2011 Inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame
- 2015 Inducted into the Apollo Theater’s Walk of Fame

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: Not Available

Information Source(s): Reporting Agencies; Baltimore City Public Schools website; Article – “The Little-Known Story Behind “Strange Fruit, Billie Holiday’s Controversial Anti-Lynching Anthem” by Kaleena Fraga; July 28, 2020

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