

**CITY OF BALTIMORE  
COUNCIL BILL 16-0287R  
(Resolution)**

---

Introduced by: Councilmembers Curran, Stokes, Henry  
Introduced and read first time: February 1, 2016  
Assigned to: Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee

---

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **F.L.A.V.O.R. – The Civil Rights Love Song**

3 FOR the purpose of recognizing John Billy’s “F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song” as  
4 Baltimore’s official civil rights love song, and commending John and Shirley Billy for  
5 providing the world with an enduring testament to the power of faith and love.

6 **Recitals**

7 In the 1950’s, interracial couples faced obstacles nearly incomprehensible today. One such  
8 couple, John and Shirley Billy, had to fight a society and legal system aligned against them, ready  
9 to attack their love with racist laws at every turn. Surmounting these obstacles has given them  
10 over a half century of faith, love, and victory over racism together. And their enduring  
11 relationship – embodied in John Billy’s music as “F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song” –  
12 serves as an inspiration to us all.

13 When Shirley and John met in 1955 Baltimore, they didn’t set out to challenge an unjust legal  
14 system, but the segregationist laws of the day were set against them nonetheless. Shirley was  
15 arrested and imprisoned in 1956 because, in the words of her indictment from May of that year,  
16 she “unlawfully suffered and permitted herself to be begotten with child by a negro or mulatto, to  
17 wit, John Moses Billy”. Their first son, Johnny, was taken from them for two years. Barred by  
18 law from marrying in their home state of Maryland, they married in Washington, D.C., but  
19 Baltimore and Maryland refused to recognize their union.

20 Despite all of this, their love persevered and triumphed. The law criminalizing a white  
21 woman’s pregnancy by a black man was struck down as unconstitutional in 1957. The Billy’s  
22 were able to get their son back before he was lost to adoption, and later had two more beautiful  
23 children together. Maryland repealed its ban on interracial marriages in 1967. They will  
24 celebrate their 58<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this year.

25 John Billy’s song “F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song” tells the amazing story of  
26 this couple, and how faith and love can transcend even seemingly insurmountable obstacles to  
27 bring people together. Today, as Black History Month begins, and with Valentine’s Day fast  
28 approaching, it is fitting that we recognize “F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song” as  
29 Baltimore’s official civil rights love song.

30 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the  
31 Council recognizes John Billy’s “F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song” as Baltimore’s

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.  
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

**Council Bill 16-0287R**

1 official civil rights love song, and commends John and Shirley Billy for providing the world with  
2 an enduring testament to the power of faith and love.

3 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the  
4 Billy family, the Executive Director of the Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts, and the  
5 Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.