



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Curran

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song

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

Recitals

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

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

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 Maryland repealed its ban on interracial marriages in 1967.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

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

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council recognizes John Billy's "F.L.A.V.O.R. - The Civil Rights Love Song" as Baltimore's official civil rights love song, and commends John and Shirley Billy for providing the world with an enduring testament to the power of faith and love.

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

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