



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 Holton

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
The Case of the Jena 6 - Justice Must Prevail

FOR the purpose of calling for justice and equity in the adjudication of six black teens from Jena, Louisiana; endorsing the efforts of the NAACP to secure the intervention of the Governor and Attorney General of Louisiana to ensure a fair outcome for the Jena 6; and expressing sorrow that such incidents continue to occur in this country.

Recitals

In September 2006, black students at Jena High School in Central Louisiana were given permission by a school official to sit under the WHITE TREE in the school yard. The day after the students sat under the tree, 3 hangman's nooses were found hanging from the tree. The 3 white students responsible for what was characterized as a "harmless prank" were sanctioned with a few days of in-school suspension.

The day after the nooses were found, black students, led by 6 black male athletes, staged a spontaneous protest rally under the tree. In response to the protest, the District Attorney, accompanied by a dozen fully uniformed police officers, addressed an emergency school assembly and, in words later admitted to under oath, warned the protest leaders that with a stroke of his pen he could take their lives away. His words were aimed at the Jena 6: Robert Bailey, Carwin Jones, Mychal Bell, Theodore Shaw, Jesse Beard, and Bryant Ray Purvis.

The series of incidents escalated tensions in the fall, when, in October, members of the Jena 6, who were invited guests at an off-campus all-white student party, were physically assaulted by adults, hit with beer bottles, punched, and kicked. Tensions continued to simmer the next day, exacerbated by on-campus verbal altercations during the lunch hour, and escalated later that month, when a white student pulled a gun on 3 of the Jena 6 at a local convenience store, and the 3 who had been accosted were later charged with theft for disarming the perpetrator who was not charged. Tensions spiraled in late November, when someone tried to burn down the school, and they tragically culminated 4 days later, when the white student who had brandished the gun was allegedly attacked in a school fight.

The "victim" was taken to the hospital and released shortly with a possible concussion. He was well enough to attend a school function that evening. The Jena 6, on the other hand, as warned by the District Attorney, had life as

they knew it taken away when they were charged with attempted second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder, charges that left them facing between 20 and 100 years in jail. The Jena 6, ranging in age from 15 to 17, had their bonds set at between \$70,000 and \$138,000 and were given an additional promise by the District Attorney that "When you are convicted, I will seek the maximum penalty allowed by law."

The plight of the Jena 6 has inflamed the conscience of a country whose people continue both to suffer from and to perpetuate many acts and thoughts of conscious and unconscious racism. Popular radio stations, black student groups, and media celebrities have brought attention to the unjust treatment of the Jena 6. The NAACP has taken the lead in these effort, asking Americans to sign a petition:

"To the Honorable Kathleen Blanco, Governor of the State of Louisiana and
Mr.Charles C. Foti, Jr., Louisiana Attorney General:

We register our outrage and object to the wrongful conviction of Mychal Bell for aggravated battery and conspiracy for the following reasons. Mychal Bell, who is African American, was convicted by an all white jury in a racially charged case. Mychal Bell's public defender did not put on any evidence and did not call any witnesses. Moreover, the aggravated battery charge was unwarranted since the alleged assailant did not use any dangerous weapon. A tennis shoe is not a deadly weapon. There was conflicting testimony regarding whether Mychal Bell was involved in the incident in question. Mychal Bell's parents were not allowed in the court room during the trial. Mychal Bell faces a potential 22 year sentence in prison.

We urge you to investigate and monitor the criminal cases against the Jena Six (Mychal Bell, Bryan Purvis, Theo Shaw, Carwin Jones, Robert Bailey Jr., and "John Doe"). All citizens should be entitled to equal treatment under the law."

No one can argue that violence in our schools can be tolerated, but neither can an unequal response to unacceptable behavior. On the one hand, activity that raises to the level of a hate crime cannot be handled with in-school suspension, while response to that activity invites the interference of outside law enforcement; possession and threatening persons with a gun cannot be ignored, while those who react to the threat by disarming the gun totor are charged with theft of that firearm; and finally, when youths engage in spontaneous mutual 'hand to hand' combat, one combatant should not be treated as an innocent victim and receive no punishment, while others are charged with attempted murder and conspiracy.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. In inviting all people who abhor racism and seek justice to join the September 20, 2007, March on Jena, the words of the NAACP Chairman are haunting: "This is an American outrage that demonstrates the continuing shame of racial division in our country."

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That this Body calls for justice and equity in the adjudication of six teens from Jena, Louisiana; endorses the efforts of the NAACP to secure the intervention of the Governor and Attorney General of Louisiana to ensure a fair outcome for the Jena 6; and expresses sorrow that such incidents continue to occur in this country.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Governor, the Governor of Louisiana, the Attorney General of Louisiana, the Chairman of the NAACP, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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ccres/Jena6/nf

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