

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 16

BY SENATORS HARRIS, ABRAHAM, ALLAIN, BERNARD, BOUIE, CARTER, CATHEY, CLOUD, CONNICK, CORTEZ, FESI, FIELDS, HENSGENS, HEWITT, JOHNS, LAMBERT, LUNEAU, MCMATH, MILLIGAN, ROBERT MILLS, MIZELL, MORRIS, PEACOCK, POPE, PRICE, REESE, SMITH, TALBOT, WARD, WHITE AND WOMACK

A RESOLUTION

To commend Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson on a distinguished career as a jurist and a life of public service to Louisiana.

WHEREAS, on February 1, 2013, Bernette Joshua Johnson was sworn in as the twenty-fifth Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, its second female Chief Justice, and its first African-American Chief Justice; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson was born in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, and received a bachelor of arts degree from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and later received an honorary doctorate in law from Spelman in April 2001; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson was one of the first African-American women to attend the law school at Louisiana State University (LSU), where she received her Juris Doctor in 1969; and

WHEREAS, while in law school, Justice Johnson worked summers for the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) and as a law clerk for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., handling cases filed by the department to implement the 1964 Civil Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also served as a federal observer during elections in Greenwood, Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, after receiving her Juris Doctor, Justice Johnson became the managing attorney with the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation, where she provided legal services to clients in socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, prior to her election to the bench, Justice Johnson spent much of her legal career working in the public sector as a legal services attorney, a Deputy City Attorney for the city of New Orleans, and as a law clerk with the U.S. Justice Department, Civil Rights Division; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also worked as a community organizer with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Educational Fund in New York City and with community groups in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana, disseminating information about recent school desegregation decisions and encouraging parents to take advantage of newly desegregated schools; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson also helped to organize household workers so they would receive social security benefits and a minimum wage; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson's judicial career began in 1984, when she was elected to the Civil District Court of New Orleans as the first woman to hold that office, and she was re-elected without opposition in 1990 before being elected Chief Judge by her colleagues in 1994; and

WHEREAS, as a civil trial judge, Justice Johnson was first assigned to Domestic Relations Court, where she established a system to refer custody, alimony, and child support issues to mediation prior to court appearances and provided that such mediation be provided to needy families based on a sliding scale system for payment of fees; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson was elected to serve on the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1994 and was re-elected without opposition in 2000 and 2010; and

WHEREAS, on the bench, Justice Johnson emphasizes principles of fairness and equality, has served on the Court's Legal Services Task Force, has served on the National Campaign on Best Practices in the area of Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts, and she has also championed many successful initiatives, including the training and certification of the Limited English Proficiency Interpreters in the courts and the implementation of an electronic filing system for the Louisiana Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, Justice Johnson provided extraordinary leadership to the Louisiana Judiciary in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by facilitating the efforts to restore the operations of all courts in the New Orleans area; and

WHEREAS, as a dedicated jurist and public servant, Chief Justice Johnson is widely recognized as a trailblazer in the judiciary and is the recipient of numerous highly coveted awards including receiving the prestigious Joan Dempsey Klein Award by the National

Association of Women Judges in October 2013, joining U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sonia Sotomayor; and

WHEREAS, in 2010 the American Bar Association recognized the value of Chief Justice Johnson's service by awarding her the Spirit of Excellence Award from the ABA's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the profession as well as the 1998 Margaret Brent Women Lawyer of Achievement Award; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Johnson has received many other notable awards, including the 2019 Gertrude E. Rush Award from the National Bar Association for her leadership in the community and in the legal profession; the 2013 Martin Luther King Unsung Hero Award presented by LSU; the 2012 National Urban League President's Award; the 2012 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Award; the 2012 Exceptional Leadership Award presented by the Louisiana State Bar Association Diversity Committee; the 2009 Distinguished Jurist Award presented by the Louisiana Bar Foundation; the 2000 Medal of Honor presented by the Mayor of the city of New Orleans; the 2000 Women of Wonder Award by the National Council of Negro Women; and the first ever Ernest N. Morial Award presented by the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of Chief Justice Johnson's impact on the judiciary, the Louisiana State Bar Association Board of Governors unanimously voted to combine the Trailblazer and Human Rights Awards into the Louisiana State Bar Association Chief Justice Bernette Johnson Trailblazer Award; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson's professional career has been full of accomplishments, she is most proud to be the loving mother, mother-in-law and grandmother of her son David Johnson, an accountant; her daughter, Orleans Parish Civil District Court Judge Rachael Johnson; her son-in-law Telley Madina; and grandchildren Joshua, Neyah, Noah, Lacey, Byron, and Telley Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Johnson is a dedicated and loving mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and friend, a jurist in the true sense of the word, an administrator, a civil rights advocate, and a public servant in the finest sense and is totally involved in her community, state, and country on behalf of the betterment of her fellow man.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson on a distinguished career as a jurist and a life of public service to Louisiana.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE