

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

**Proclaim September 22, 2020 as “Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. Day”
Throughout Los Angeles County**

In recognition of the contributions made by the Reverend James M. Lawson to nonviolent resistance during the civil rights and social justice movements throughout this nation’s history as well as present-day current events, and in recognition of his 92nd birthday on September 22, 2020, the day should be celebrated and proclaimed as the “Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. Day” throughout Los Angeles County.

Throughout the civil rights movement, ministers like Reverend Lawson were actively involved in training countless men and women on nonviolent resistance to achieve social justice. His commitment to the fight for civil rights for African Americans is well documented throughout this nation’s recent history. From a young age, Reverend Lawson sought to improve the lives and conditions of African Americans in his community. In 1951, he served 13 months of a three-year sentence for refusing to register for the draft. After his release, he traveled to India to study Mahatma Gandhi’s method of nonviolence to achieve social and political change. Reverend Lawson was so moved by the ongoing social justice movement in the United States, that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged him to move to the South and teach nonviolent resistance to the men and women fighting for equal rights. In 1958, he relocated to Tennessee where he began to train men and women on nonviolent resistance practices. He along with others were

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influential in the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In 1961, he participated and assisted in the coordination of the Freedom Rides, as well as the Meredith March in 1966. He was one of the key organizers of the Memphis sanitation workers strike which would become the last event where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would ever share one of his most inspirational and heart-moving speeches. It was in this last speech in 1968, "I've Been to the Mountaintop", that Dr. King spoke of Reverend Lawson by saying " He's been going to jail for struggling; he's been kicked out of Vanderbilt University for this struggling; but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people".¹ Reverend Lawson has dedicated his life to fighting for social justice for those communities often overlooked and marginalized.

In 1974, Reverend Lawson relocated from the South to Los Angeles to assume the role of pastor at the historic Holman Methodist Church where he would serve until his retirement in 1999. During his tenure, he served as the president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which traces its founding to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His commitment to social justice is long-lasting, unwavering and timeless. His experiences and his words have been used by generations as the foundation and framework for the fight for equality and social justice. He has taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, California State University, Northridge, and countless other educational institutions. Even in retirement, he continues to travel across the country to participate in protests and give lectures, inspiring thousands of people to take action and become involved in the fight for social justice and civil rights.

¹ <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/lawson-james-m>
(Quoting King, "I've Been," 214)

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On September 22, Reverend Lawson will celebrate his 92nd birthday. Due to his life-long work and commitment to civil rights and social justice, it is fitting and appropriate that the Board honor Reverend Lawson by proclaiming September 22, 2020, as Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. Day throughout the County.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Proclaim September 22, 2020 as “Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. Day” throughout the County of Los Angeles in honor of his decades of leadership in the ongoing fight for civil rights and social justice, and for his work in teaching nonviolent resistance to not only African Americans, but to all people across the country and to the Los Angeles community.

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