

The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act

On February 8, 2007, Senators Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Congressmen John Lewis (D-GA) and Kenny Hulshof (R-MO) reintroduced the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act (S. 535/H.R. 923).

This legislation passed the House and Senate Judiciary Committees unanimously in mid-June. On June 20, 2007, H.R. 923 was adopted by the House by a vote of 422-2, and the Senate unanimously passed the bill on September 24, 2008.

When the President signed H.R. 923 on October 7, 2008, the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2008 became Public Law No: 110-344.

Bill Summary

- **STRUCTURED EFFORT**-- Appoints a new Deputy Chief of the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division and a new Supervisory Special Agent in the Civil Rights Unit responsible for coordinating the investigation and prosecutions of outstanding Civil Rights cases.
- **COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION** – Strengthens federal coordination with State and local law enforcement officials and allows flexibility to recognize potentially hostile jurisdictions that may obstruct the process.
- **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY** – Strong report language requires the Attorney General to make a clear, public report on status, number of federal investigations, and the resources dedicated to this effort.
- **INCREASED RESOURCES**-- Authorizes an additional \$10 million for the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute outstanding Civil Rights Era crimes; \$2 million in grants to State and local law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes; \$1.5 million for the Community Relations Service Department of Justice to provide technical support for local and community coordination.
- **AGGRESSIVE TIMELINE** – Includes a sunset provision which combined with the report language authorizes a 10-year comprehensive assertive process to investigate and prosecute these atrocities.

Background

It is still imperative to bring anyone involved in these crimes to justice, even if several decades have passed since the crimes were committed, as proven by the historic conviction of Edgar Ray Killen for the 1964 deaths of three Civil Rights workers: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Witnesses are elderly and time is of the essence.

Currently, the FBI and the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice are responsible for all criminal Civil Rights cases, as well as current investigations and prosecutions.

There are no specific resources to solve these outstanding crimes and bring healing, justice, and peace to the affected families, friends, communities, and our nation as a whole.

H.R. 923/ S.535 Cosponsors

House (82)

Reps. Abercrombie, Baldwin, Becerra, Berman, Bishop, Boswell, Brown, C. (FL), Butterfield, Capuano, Carson, Castor, Christensen, Clarke, Clay, Cleaver, Clyburn, Cohen, Conyers, Cummings, Davis, A., Davis, D., Delahunt, Ellison, Farr, Fattah, Filner, Green, A., Grijalva, Gutierrez, Hastings (FL), Hinojosa, Holmes Norton, Honda, Jackson-Lee, Jefferson, Johnson, E.B., Johnson, H., Kennedy, Kilpatrick, Kucinich, Lampson (TX), Lee (CA), Lofgren, Maloney, Marshall, McCarthy (NY), McCotter, McDermott, Meehan, Meek, Meeks (NY), Millender-McDonald, Moore, Miller, D. (KS), Moore, G. (WI), Moran, Nadler, Olver, Payne, Rangel, Rush, Linda Sanchez, Schakowsky, Schiff, Scott, D., Scott, R. (VA), Serrano, Sherman, Skelton, Slaughter, L. Smith, Thompson, Towns, Tubbs Jones, Van Hollen, Wasserman-Schultz, Waters, Watson, Watt, Weiner, Wexler, Woolsey, Wynn

Senate (13)

Sens. Alexander (R-TN), Biden (D-DE), Cardin (MD), Cochran (R-MS), Cornyn (R-TX), Durbin (D-IL), Hatch (R-UT), Landrieu (D-LA), Kennedy (D-MA), McCaskill (D-MO), Schumer (D-NY), Specter (PA), and Whitehouse (D-RI)

Who Supports the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act?

The Emmett Till Justice Campaign • Southern Poverty Law Center • Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials (GABEO) • The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) • The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) • The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law • Moores Ford Memorial Committee • The International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies • The National Association of Human Rights Workers • Atlanta Women's Action for New Direction (WAND) • The Justice Campaign of America • The National Black United Front •