

House Resolution 646

By: Representatives Benfield of the 85th, Drenner of the 86th, Bell of the 58th, Henson of the 87th, Brooks of the 63rd, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing and commending the Southern Center for Human Rights on the occasion of its
2 35th anniversary; and for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, the Southern Center for Human Rights (SCHR) is an Atlanta based nonprofit
4 law firm dedicated to providing legal representation to people facing the death penalty,
5 challenging human rights violations in prisons and jails, seeking to improve legal
6 representation for poor people accused of crimes through litigation and advocacy, and
7 advocating for criminal justice reform on behalf of those affected by the system in the
8 Southern United States; and

9 WHEREAS, the SCHR was originally named the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee and
10 was founded in 1976 by ministers and activists in response to the United States Supreme
11 Court's reinstatement of the death penalty and to the horrendous conditions in Southern
12 prisons and jails; and

13 WHEREAS, for the last 35 years, the SCHR has struggled alongside civil rights
14 organizations, families of incarcerated people, and faith based communities to protect the
15 civil and human rights of people of color, poor people, and those facing the death penalty or
16 confined to prisons and jails in the South; and

17 WHEREAS, the SCHR is working towards building a society that does not use the existence
18 of crime to justify capital punishment, mass incarceration, or the exploitation of poor people
19 and people of color, and instead secures public safety through prevention, treatment, and
20 economic justice; and

21 WHEREAS, the goals of the SCHR include reducing the number of people on death row in
22 Alabama and Georgia by means other than execution, reducing the number of people under
23 criminal justice control in Alabama and Georgia, securing a fully-funded indigent defense

24 system with competent counsel in Georgia, and reducing the financial incentives driving the
25 growth of the criminal justice system; and

26 WHEREAS, over the years, SCHR attorneys and investigators have earned a reputation for
27 zealous advocacy and the highest quality legal work on behalf of individuals facing the death
28 penalty and have set the standard in both fact and mitigation investigation; and

29 WHEREAS, two SCHR cases, *Amadeo v. Zant* and *Ford v. Georgia*, resulted in unanimous
30 decisions by the United States Supreme Court setting aside Georgia death sentences due to
31 racial discrimination at capital trials; and

32 WHEREAS, the SCHR also has a strong civil litigation practice that is able to bring impact
33 litigation challenging the systemic deficiencies and has forced county, state, and federal
34 governments to make significant improvements in prisons and jails across the South to
35 reduce overcrowding, provide adequate medical and mental health care, abate violence and
36 abuse, and thereby fulfill their constitutional obligations to protect the people in their
37 custody; and

38 WHEREAS, the SCHR's civil litigation has resulted in the passage of the Georgia Indigent
39 Defense Act of 2003 and the establishment of the Georgia Public Defender Standards
40 Council and the Georgia Capital Defender Office; and

41 WHEREAS, in the course of advocating for people in prison, the SCHR has seen, and in turn
42 publicized, a myriad of abuses inflicted by a spectrum of criminal justice policies and
43 practices; and

44 WHEREAS, the Human Rights Internship Program at the SCHR is one of the most respected
45 and competitive internship opportunities for law school and college students in the country,
46 in which students are given significant responsibility, actively participate in SCHR's
47 litigation and advocacy, and receive in-depth training throughout the program; and

48 WHEREAS, today, the SCHR continues to work towards its vision that the criminal justice
49 system be used not as a tool to concentrate power and control, but instead as an instrument
50 of true justice by which individuals and communities remain accountable to each other; and

51 WHEREAS, it is abundantly fitting and proper that the outstanding work of this fine
52 organization be appropriately recognized.

53 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
54 the members of this body congratulate the Southern Center for Human Rights on its 35th
55 anniversary, recognize the legacy of achievement and the contributions it has made to
56 Georgia's legal community, and extend best wishes for continued success in its ongoing
57 efforts to make a profound impact and footprint on the world and in Georgia courtrooms.

58 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
59 and directed to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to the Southern Center for
60 Human Rights.