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AB-2268 Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse. (2021-2022)

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Assembly Bill No. 2268

CHAPTER 410

An act relating to the Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

[Approved by Governor September 18, 2022. Filed with Secretary of State September 18, 2022.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2268, Gray. Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse.

Existing law establishes the superior courts, courts of appeal, and the Supreme Court.

This bill would rename the main courthouse of the Superior Court of California, County of Merced, as the Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse, and would make related findings and declarations.

This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.

Vote: 2/3 Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Charles James Ogletree, Jr. is a beloved native son of the City of Merced and the State of California, whose pioneering contributions in the areas of law, civil rights, and education have earned him the respect and admiration of his family, friends, colleagues, and the countless individuals whose lives he touched.

(2) Born on December 31, 1952, in Merced to Willie Mae Ogletree and Charles Ogletree Sr., Professor Ogletree grew up in a migrant worker community and began working in the fields at a young age. While he excelled in high school, he also witnessed firsthand the challenges of African Americans facing prejudice and injustice.

(3) Following his graduation in 1970, Professor Ogletree enrolled at Stanford University, where he earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Political Science, became active in the burgeoning civil rights movement, and met Pamela Barnes, whom he married in 1975. When he was accepted into Harvard Law School that same year, the newlyweds moved to Massachusetts.

(4) After earning his Juris Doctor in 1978, Professor Ogletree joined the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia and moved to Washington, D.C., with Pamela and their son, Charles Ogletree III, and the young family was soon blessed with the birth of their daughter, Rashida, in 1979.

(5) Known for his cool, collected demeanor and formidable courtroom presence, Professor Ogletree excelled as a public defender and was named director of staff training in 1982 until 1985, when he became a partner in the Washington law firm of Jessamy, Fort, & Ogletree while concurrently serving as a visiting professor at Harvard Law School.

(6) In 1986, Professor Ogletree became founding director of Harvard's Introduction to Trial Advocacy workshops, a program he created to inject a more clinical, hands-on approach into the curriculum. In 1990 he founded the school's Criminal Justice Institute, a program that engaged low-income communities in Boston and included a Saturday school so African American students could learn from seasoned professionals.

(7) Routinely taking on controversial cases that risked his job and career, including representing Anita Hill during Clarence Thomas' confirmation hearings to the United States Supreme Court and seeking reparations for the survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Professor Ogletree demonstrated through both his words and his actions his commitment to civil rights, social justice, and equality for all.

(8) Named the Harvard Law School Jesse Climenko Professor of Law in 1998 and Vice Dean for Clinical Programs in 2003, and as founding Director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice in 2004, Professor Ogletree inspired generations of students throughout his teaching career, including former President of the United States and First Lady Barack and Michelle Obama.

(9) Well known as a frequently published legal scholar and strong advocate for racial justice, Professor Ogletree became a sought-after expert and commentator on national television news programs, and in 2002, his stellar work was recognized by The National Law Journal, which named him one of the 100 Most Influential Lawyers in America.

(10) Determined to improve the educational opportunities for underserved and underrepresented students, Professor Ogletree established a college scholarship fund for students in his hometown of Merced, California, and served as a founding member of the Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

(11) A close friend of the late South African President Nelson Mandela, Professor Ogletree was honored to receive the Nelson Mandela Service Award from the National Black Law Students Association in 1991, one of the many accolades he was presented with over the course of his career.

(12) Limitless in his vision and capacity to excel, Professor Ogletree's life and career demonstrate how his humble beginnings informed the passions and principles of a man who proved to be on the right side of history even as it was being created around him.

(13) The Judicial Council's Courthouse Naming Policy permits courthouses to be named only after either their physical location or in honor of a deceased person.

(14) Public awareness of the overpolicing of predominantly Black and Brown communities and the disproportionate use of excessive and deadly force against these communities has led to a national discussion on how to address these longstanding disparities.

(15) Disproportionate sentencing against minority communities, and in particular Black men, is well documented.

(16) Conducting judicial proceedings in a courthouse named for a prominent black man whose contributions to the legal profession and our national conversation about race have grown ever more pertinent will serve as a reminder of the inequalities the judicial system has helped perpetuate.

(b) Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to rename the main courthouse of the Superior Court of California, County of Merced, as the Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse Superior Court of California.

SEC. 2. Notwithstanding Section 70391 of the Government Code, the main courthouse of the Superior Court of California, County of Merced, currently located at 2260 N Street in the City of Merced, County of Merced, shall be renamed as the Charles James Ogletree, Jr. Courthouse.

SEC. 3. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the California Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

In order to advance recognition of a pivotal, still-living civil rights advocate who is currently faced with difficult circumstances impacting his health.