



## Legislation Text

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**File #: 0073X-2020, Version: 1**

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To celebrate the life and service of Mr. Willie Lee Gaddis and to extend our sincerest condolences to his family and friends on the occasion of his passing, Wednesday, April 1, 2020.

**WHEREAS**, the members of Columbus City Council extend this resolution of expression in honor of the life and service of Mr. Willie Lee Gaddis who peacefully passed away on Wednesday, April 1, 2020; and

**WHEREAS**, Willie Lee Gaddis began his earthly pilgrimage on Monday, January 31, 1927, in rural Montrose, Mississippi (near Bay Springs), in Jasper County. On Wednesday, April 1, 2020, at age 93, after a brief illness, he peacefully drew his final breath, entering into eternal rest on what would have been his youngest daughter's 53rd birthday; and

**WHEREAS**, Willie was the youngest child born to Willie and Eunice (McGee) Gaddis. His parents were sharecroppers in the pre-civil rights era. He, his sister and parents lived in a house owned by the man whose property they worked picking cotton. Willie often recalled the mistreatment he experienced in the south, especially being routinely evicted from their home when the property owner would get angry. He remembers staying with Uncle Mike and Aunt Ruthie McGee during some of those times. The experience so seared his conscience that as a young boy, he resolved to own his own business so, "I will be my own boss." He dreamed of growing up, being a homeowner, and married with two boys and two girls. He often reflected, "I never want my wife and children to experience being uprooted from their home;" and

**WHEREAS**, as a boy, he envisioned his wife would have long, curly hair that bounced when she walked. He'd tell us, "When I saw your Momma walking down Mt. Vernon Avenue, I knew she was the girl in my dreams." And so it was. Rev. J.W. Butler, the first pastor of First Church of God, was the officiant of their union on Saturday, April 11, 1953, with Obbie McGee and Ruth Thompson DeBerry as best man and maid of honor respectively; and

**WHEREAS**, before marriage, he was proud to enlist in the United States Army serving in Germany during World War II. Private Willie Lee Gaddis was a Rigging Specialist with Company E, 41st Engineers. It was his great joy to be honored by Honor Flight Columbus on April 18, 2015, with a day-long visit to Washington, D.C., in commemoration of his military service. He also cherished being the guest of Bro. Thomas Glover at the annual Veterans Celebration hosted by the Beta Omicron Sigma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated, who in 2019 gave him the award for being the oldest veteran present. He often marveled at how the Lord's hand guided him even in Germany, recalling a Chaplain who looked out after the then 18-year-old young man from Mississippi; and

**WHEREAS**, despite his challenging beginnings, he often spoke of the goodness of God to him. Losing his mother at the tender age of 8, he often reflected how the hand of God kept him and his sister Inez together. Grandmother Eunice died alone in a hospital that was a full day's journey in a wagon pulled by two mules. The last time he saw her, she was waving from the hospital window. Before she died, she left a message with a nurse asking her husband, to always keep their children together. Various relatives took them in while she was hospitalized because their father worked out of town and was only home on the weekends. Willie, affectionately known as Poppa, eventually married Ruby Moncrief (Mama Ruby), who loved him and his sister as much as her own daughter Nettie. The sacredness of family forged early in his life became one of his defining characteristics. To know Willie was to have no doubt that he absolutely cherished his wife and adored his children, grand and great-grandchildren. He loved family gatherings that also included extended family. He and Mommy also loved including our beloved church family, and the pallet was always tickled by good food and laughter. They enjoyed gathering for holidays and birthdays. There were even sightings of "Santa Claus" at Christmas.

When Randal and Elizabeth's sons were young, they and the Clarke and Washington girls were treated to Willie as Santa Clause some years, complete with the full attire, sometimes it was Pastor, Dwayne, or Randal. Ahhh, great times and sweet memories; and

**WHEREAS**, a strong work ethic is another defining characteristic that describes Willie. The irrefutable proof is that he worked several jobs as a young man, including the Pennsylvania Railroad, and later on various blue-collar jobs to provide for his family. As a concrete foreman for Coady Construction, he and Mommy stepped out on faith and established a business in the basement of their home. On Tuesday, March 16, 1971, armed with one employee (his cousin Bobby Bester), his 8th-grade education, and around \$500, the Gaddis' embarked upon an audacious journey. The company began with a residential customer base and expanded to include commercial projects a short time later. The company's first public works contract was the City of Worthington (Ohio) 1974 Street Improvement Program. Gaddis & Son, Inc., a minority business enterprise, had a role in pouring concrete on many of the significant projects that shaped the central Ohio landscape. In 1994, Randal L. Gaddis I became president. Later, in 2006, one of his four sons, Matthew, joined him to continue the family legacy; and

**WHEREAS**, In addition to Gaddis & Son's footprint in concrete projects across the city and surrounding municipalities, literally hundreds of men and women found employment. They were afforded training opportunities to sustain their families because this business dared to be. The consummate entrepreneur, he was fearless in seeking additional opportunities. He dreamed of ways to assist small businessmen in the construction industry. In addition to an on-site brick and mortar mixer, there were several versions of ready mixed concrete, such as V & G Ready Mix, which has evolved to the current Ready, Mix, Go; and

**WHEREAS**, Faithfulness to God and the work of the First Church of God were paramount and another defining characteristic. He accepted Christ as a young man when the church was located at Champion and Toronto. In the early years, the congregation organized in teams for the building fund effort to move from that location to Wilson and Fair. He and Mommy were co-captains who always worked with the older saints. She would bake pies and cakes, and he would take them on the construction site to sell. Their team would always exceed their goal. They modeled sacrificial service and commitment in front of their children and grandchildren, so it's in our DNA. When Randal, Matthew, Curtis, and Westley were pre-schoolers, they had an offering envelope number, and Willie impressed upon them the importance of tithing. In addition, he helped form their taste for shirts and ties; and

**WHEREAS**, in the early years, Willie served on the Usher Board and Deacon Board. His chief love was the Trustee Board as both member and Chairperson. He took this responsibility seriously and served for over 40 years before gaining the status of Trustee Emeritus. Even then, he continued to serve as a member of the Ambassador Ministry working with new members, and as a member of the Hospitality Ministry. He loved greeting the saints and visitors. When he was unable to stand, the team would let him sit and greet. Until he was hospitalized on February 29, 2020, he was still making weekly calls to check in on people. We often heard him offering words of encouragement, admonishment, and praise, ending calls with his familiar, "Now, you be faithful and true to the Lord." Over the years, he always mentored young boys and young men. He would often plan fishing trips and field trips until he was unable to. The highlight of each month was the first Saturday Men's Fellowship with the crew at Golden Corral. He diligently prepared a "message" each month, and often wanted it posted on, "the Facebook." He enjoyed the comments he received; and

**WHEREAS**, He was serious about making sure he was living obediently to God. He was often seen kneeling in prayer, reading one of his two favorite books, The Bible or the Purpose Driven Life, and listening over and over to sermons from Bishop Timothy J. Clarke, Bishop Dale Bronner, or Rev. Charles Stanley. He was wholeheartedly supportive of his pastor and his vision, to the very end. He financially supported every building fund project and was "all in" on the current campaign. During his prayer time, he could be heard asking the Lord to bless and take care of his pastor, first family, and First Church. Literally, in his final days, he called out to pastor in his subconscious, encouraging him to take care of his health, and carrying on the ongoing joke about getting a chance to preach his trial sermon one day, on February 29th; and

**WHEREAS**, Willie loved to fish and hunt. He was an avid sports fan and enjoyed cheering the Cleveland Indians, Browns, Cavaliers, and Buckeyes football and basketball teams. Willie loved fun and laughter with all he came in contact

with. When he held court after both Sunday morning services, he teased and laughed with the saints, not forgetting to offer a word of encouragement. During the senior lunch-time on Wednesday after Noon service, he'd stir things up teasing all, especially Mothers Ophelia Murray, Lydian Aaron, and Pauline Edwards. He and Mommy loved to travel and would go on tours with complete strangers. Often they'd be the only Black couple, but they'd soon have new acquaintances because Willie was always teasing someone. They also enjoyed traveling with close friends, Bud and Pat Martin, Robert and Betty Lawson, and Arthur and Elenore Davenport. One of his favorite adventures was with members of First Church in South Africa; and

**WHEREAS**, Willie was a humble man. Two recognitions he was most proud of. He was touched by the honor bestowed on him with the joint naming of the First Church of God Family Life Center. And just recently, on February 19, 2020, he was surprised to be recognized by Columbus City Council during the Black History Month Celebration with a Poindexter Award; and

**WHEREAS**, we are grateful for the full life he lived. Remaining to cherish his memory and continue his legacy are his remaining children: Alethea Eunice Gaddis, Randal (Elizabeth) Lydell Gaddis I, Sylvia Elaine Gaddis; son-in-love Rodney Tyrone Sawyer, grandsons Randal (Kristy) Lydell Gaddis II, Curtis William Gaddis, Westley (Lydia) Stephen Gaddis, and Matthew (Stefanie) Thompson Gaddis; great-grandchildren Ezra James, Weston Kenneth, Madison Michelle, William "Willie" Charles, Titus Alexander, Morgan Michelle, Aida Elizabeth, Alexander Gideon, Charlotte Mary-Alice, and Malia Michelle. He also leaves a sister, Nettie McElwain, two brothers-in-love, Edward Charles Thompson and William Flemister Thompson. Special family members, Robert and Barbara Booker, Ted (Melanie) Murdaugh, special grandchildren, Marquette (Ian) Cunningham, Iesha Goins and Ariel Goins, a myriad of beloved special nieces, nephews, cousins, relatives, friends, sons, and daughters in the faith who revered him as Pop or Daddy Gaddis - He is preceded in death by his beloved wife of 64 years, Vivian Ann Thompson Gaddis, daughter Debra Anne Gaddis-Sawyer; parents Willie and Eunice (McGee) Gaddis, step-mother Ruby Moncrief Gaddis, sister Inez Gaddis Moncrief, and many family members by birth and church affiliation - How appropriate that he will be laid to rest and join Mommy on the occasion of their 67th wedding anniversary; now therefore,

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:** That this Council does hereby celebrate the life and service of Mr. Willie Lee Gaddis and to extend our sincerest condolences to his family and friends on the occasion of his passing, Wednesday, April 1, 2020.