

# THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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## MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **USCCR MOURNS THE PASSING OF RENOWNED CIVIL RIGHTS ATTORNEY AND LEADER OLIVER W. HILL**

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights acknowledges the passing and celebrates the life of Oliver W. Hill, pioneering civil rights attorney and leader. Mr. Hill earned his law degree from Howard University School of Law in 1933 alongside his close friend Thurgood Marshall. Mr. Hill won his first civil rights case in Virginia following his return to his hometown of Richmond in 1940. He joined the U.S. Army in 1943 and served in Europe. In 1948, Mr. Hill became the first African American elected to the Richmond City Council since 1898. He was the lead attorney in a lawsuit filed in 1951 on behalf of African American students decrying the deplorable conditions at their high school in Farmville, VA. The Supreme Court combined this case, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Va.*, with four others when it issued its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Mr. Hill's position at the forefront of the civil rights struggle drew many threats of violence not only to him, but to his family. At one point, the threats were so numerous that he and his wife forbade their son from answering the telephone. In 1961, President Kennedy appointed Mr. Hill assistant to the commissioner at the Federal Housing Administration. President Clinton awarded Mr. Hill the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, on August 11, 1999.

Commission Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds said "Mr. Hill's monumental civil rights work and leadership during our nation's struggle for equality laid the cornerstone for the rights and freedoms we, as Americans, all enjoy today. He is greatly missed, but his achievements will live forever."

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Kenneth L. Marcus is Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the media and general public.

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