

By: Anchia

H.R. No. 969

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The year 2019 marks the 10th anniversary of the
2 passage of the Tim Cole Act by the 81st Texas Legislature, and this
3 milestone provides a fitting opportunity to honor the memory of
4 those esteemed Texans who dedicated their lives to improving the
5 state's criminal justice system; and

6 WHEREAS, Signed into law by Governor Rick Perry in 2009, the
7 Tim Cole Act increased financial compensation for the wrongly
8 imprisoned; the legislation is named in honor of Timothy Cole, the
9 first person in the country to be exonerated posthumously through
10 DNA testing; a veteran of the U.S. Army and former Texas Tech
11 student, Mr. Cole died in prison in 1999; his family, the crime
12 victim, and the Innocence Project of Texas worked together to clear
13 his name, and he received the state's first posthumous pardon in
14 2010; five years later, his alma mater presented his family with an
15 honorary degree in law and social justice to recognize Mr. Cole's
16 sacrifice and contributions to reforms in the state's criminal
17 justice system; the city of Lubbock now has a statue dedicated to
18 his memory, and a Texas Historical Commission marker is in place
19 near his gravesite in Fort Worth, his hometown; and

20 WHEREAS, The Innocence Project of Texas was founded in 2006
21 by attorneys Mike Ware and Jeff Blackburn to provide pro bono
22 investigative and legal services to indigent Texans convicted of
23 crimes they did not commit; since its inception, the organization
24 and its board members have won the freedom of 25 men and women;

1 among those cleared were three men, now deceased, who devoted
2 themselves to helping others still wrongfully incarcerated; and

3 WHEREAS, On March 28, 2019, staff, board members, exonerees,
4 and volunteers of the Innocence Project of Texas are visiting the
5 State Capitol for the inaugural Innocence Project of Texas Advocacy
6 Day, bringing broader statewide attention to the need for criminal
7 justice reform and to the contributions of exonerees who have
8 passed away; and

9 WHEREAS, James Lee Woodard of Dallas County was exonerated in
10 2009 following 27 years in prison, and while working on behalf of
11 criminal justice reform, he donated \$100,000 to study the causes of
12 wrongful convictions, including faulty eyewitness identification;
13 he passed away in October 2012; and

14 WHEREAS, Billy James Smith of Dallas County, exonerated in
15 2006 following two decades in prison, accepted speaking engagements
16 across the country to address criminal justice reform; in addition,
17 he testified before the U.S. Congress and the Texas Legislature on
18 numerous pieces of legislation; in the spring of 2007, he spoke
19 passionately at a public meeting of the Dallas County Commissioners
20 Court asking that they fund what would become the first Conviction
21 Integrity Unit in the country; the unit's ensuing successes gave
22 rise to conviction integrity units all over the United States; he
23 passed away in March 2017; and

24 WHEREAS, Johnnie Lindsey of Dallas County, imprisoned for 26
25 years before his exoneration in 2008, became a private investigator
26 and process server while working to free the innocent; he died in
27 February 2018; and

1 WHEREAS, A fourth man, Ronald Gene Taylor of Harris County,
2 served 13 years in prison until 2008, when he was exonerated by the
3 work of the Innocence Project based in New York; he dedicated
4 himself to criminal justice reform at the state and national level
5 until his death in September 2018; and

6 WHEREAS, These brave and resolute Texans set an inspiring
7 example through their tremendous commitment to criminal justice
8 reform, and their legacy will long endure; now, therefore, be it

9 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 86th Texas
10 Legislature hereby commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Tim Cole
11 Act, pay tribute to the lives of Timothy Cole, James Lee Woodard,
12 Johnnie Lindsey, Billy James Smith, and Ronald Gene Taylor, and
13 recognize the ongoing work of the Innocence Project of Texas to
14 right the wrongs that have occurred through mistakes made in our
15 criminal justice system.