

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.