



Legislation Text

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A MOTION commemorating and condemning the imprisonment of Gordon Hirabayashi in the King County Jail for defying the forced removal of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants during World War II, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of his imprisonment.

WHEREAS, Gordon Hirabayashi was born in Seattle on April 23, 1918, to Japanese immigrant parents, Shungo and Mitsuko Hirabayashi, and

WHEREAS, after moving as a child with his family to the White River valley in south King County, Gordon Hirabayashi graduated from Auburn High School in 1935, and

WHEREAS, Gordon Hirabayashi enrolled at the University of Washington as a part-time student in 1937, and

WHEREAS, following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, an executive order signed by the president of the United States ordered the forced removal of all Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants living on the west coast of the United States, and

WHEREAS, Gordon Hirabayashi refused to register for incarceration or to subject himself to the curfew that had been applied to people of Japanese ancestry, and instead presented himself to the Federal Bureau of Investigation with a statement objecting to incarceration and curfew, and

WHEREAS, on May 13, 1942, in preparation for his resistance and expected imprisonment, Gordon Hirabayashi wrote a letter entitled, "Why I Refused to Register for Evacuation," in which he stated, "This order for the mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese descent denies them the right to live... This order limits to

almost full extent the creative expressions of these subjected. It kills the desire for a higher life. The very qualities which are essential to a peaceful, creative community are being thrown out and abused. Over sixty per cent are American citizens; yet they are denied on a wholesale scale without due process of law the civil liberties which are theirs," and

WHEREAS, Gordon Hirabayashi was then arrested and confined in the King County Jail, Tank 3C, which was at that time located in the King County Courthouse building, where he spent nine months awaiting trial, from May 16, 1942, to February 11, 1943, and

WHEREAS, on July 4, 1942, while imprisoned in the King County Jail, Gordon Hirabayashi wrote in his journal, "The risk is great; the consequences unpleasant. But there is the vision of those seekers of independence. We must carry the torch. We must live our lives," and

WHEREAS, the case against Gordon Hirabayashi eventually proceeded to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously against him on June 21, 1943, maintaining that the incarceration of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants was justified by military necessity, and

WHEREAS, on September 24, 1987, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of Gordon Hirabayashi, vacating the Supreme Court decision and his previous conviction, on the basis that the government had withheld evidence indicating that Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants were not a threat to the United States during World War II, and

WHEREAS, Gordon Hirabayashi passed away on January 2, 2012, and

WHEREAS, on April 26, 2012, President Barack Obama named Gordon Hirabayashi as a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and

WHEREAS, in honor of Gordon Hirabayashi, an affordable housing development named Hirabayashi

Place was opened by InterIm CDA in early 2016 in the Nihonmachi, or Japantown, neighborhood of Seattle, several blocks south of the King County Courthouse, after receiving financial support from the sale of the King County-owned Kingdome North Lot property, and

WHEREAS, through his resistance, imprisonment and quest to overturn the executive order, Gordon Hirabayashi exemplified the values that are central to the founding of the United States, its Constitution and the rule of law, and

WHEREAS, the imprisonment of Gordon Hirabayashi in the King County Jail must be remembered so that government officials do not ever again repeat the injustice that was perpetrated with the incarceration of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The imprisonment of Gordon Hirabayashi in the King County Jail is commemorated and condemned, as is the incarceration of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants during World War II that Gordon Hirabayashi fought to overturn.

B. The executive and 4Culture are respectfully requested to assist in the commemoration and condemnation of Gordon Hirabayashi's imprisonment in the King County Jail by helping to identify the location of his jail cell within the current configuration of the King County Courthouse and by preparing a plaque to summarize his time in the King County Jail, as well as his quest for justice.

C. The plaque should be installed and the imprisonment of Gordon Hirabayashi memorialized by May 16, 2017, the seventy-fifth anniversary of his imprisonment.