

REPRESENTATIVE **JOHN LEWIS**

*Serving the Fifth District of Georgia*



## **Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act Introduced**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WASHINGTON--** On Tuesday a bipartisan, bicameral coalition introduced the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act of 2016. The House (H.R.5067) bill is led by Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and Rep. John Conyers (D-MI). The Senate (S.2854) companion is introduced by Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Sen. Claire McCaskill, (D-MO), and Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO).

### **BACKGROUND**

Before the passage of major civil rights legislation in the 1960s, hundreds of racially suspicious crimes were committed in this country, and few attempts to prosecute them were ever pursued. [Tuskegee Institute once kept a record of verified lynchings](#) in the United States from 1877 to 1950. The institute documented that nearly 4000 mainly unprosecuted civil rights crimes occurred during that period. [Many American families continue to pass down stories of loss and disappearance even today](#) without knowing the truth about what actually happened to their loved ones.

### **PRIMARY GOALS OF THE BILL**

The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act represents a critical opportunity to right these wrongs committed, primarily against African Americans, but also against people of diverse backgrounds. In some cases, individuals still remain who were witnesses to these crimes or who can help provide evidence regarding these incidents. This bill reauthorizes and updates the original legislation that was signed into law in 2008. It seeks to respond to the concerns of victims' family members and strengthen collaboration between the Justice Department, the FBI, State and local law enforcement, and advocates to pursue these cold cases. There is a collective goal to seek the truth about this long-standing tragedies and hold the perpetrators and orchestrators of these atrocities accountable. This reauthorization also seeks to respond to the concerns of advocates regarding the implementation of the original legislation.

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## **STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT**

"It was Dr. King who said the time is always right to do what is right. We can never heal from the injuries of the past by sweeping hundreds of crimes under the rug. We have an obligation, a mission, and a mandate to continue the effort required to wash away these stains on our democracy. I am glad to say this bill incorporates the advice and counsel of numerous individuals and groups who are also dedicated to the pursuit of justice in these matters. Their tireless efforts have helped us improve this legislation so that more work can be done to end the pain, doubt and the inconsistent application of justice that has languished unattended for decades. I thank my colleagues for their support as original sponsors and call on all members who are interested in the fairness and true equality to join us in the passage of this legislation." **Rep. John Lewis**

"There are many evils of our past that we cannot right, but we can make sure that the truth about these injustices does come to light. I am honored to join Congressman Lewis to introduce this legislation to make it possible for the FBI and the Justice Department to continue their important work to investigate these cold cases and bring the perpetrators of racially-motivated crimes to justice. Uncovering and confronting the truth about these crimes is essential to ensuring that no one is above the law and that all Americans are worthy of the protection of our laws." **Sen. Richard Burr**

"Too many families suffer from the unsolved murders of their loved ones during the civil rights era without receiving justice. The way to best serve these families is to provide our Federal government with the tools it needs to investigate these unsolved crimes, and to hopefully, bring some sense of closure for these families. I thank Congressman Lewis for his tireless work on behalf of the families of these victims of unsolved murders from the civil rights era and I am proud to stand with him on this effort." **Sen. Patrick Leahy**

"Now's not the time to let up on our efforts to investigate and prosecute these heinous, racially-motivated murders—the loved ones and communities affected by this violence deserve justice, no matter how long it's been denied to them," said McCaskill, a former Jackson County Prosecutor. "Too many civil rights-era cases remain unsolved, so we should keep these vital tools available so federal investigators can keep working toward long overdue justice." **Sen. Claire McCaskill**

"The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act sets out to investigate racially-motivated murders. Sadly, there is still more work to be done and it's important that we reauthorize this bill so that the FBI and DOJ can continue investigating unsolved crimes." **Sen. Roy Blunt**

"I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of the Emmett Till Reauthorization Act. Passage of this bipartisan legislation will provide for a sustained, well-coordinated effort to investigate and prosecute unsolved civil rights-era crimes. There are hundreds of cold cases from the civil rights era that have never been solved and it is my hope that we are able to bring justice to the victims' families." **Rep. Sensenbrenner**

"As we work to address current questions about racial violence and civil rights, we should be mindful of our history and why so many in the African-American community raise the issue of black live matter. Passage of the Emmett Till Act represented a commitment to resolving the unanswered questions from one of the darkest periods in modern American history. Reauthorization represents a further investment in our history and will allow the Department of Justice to resolve remaining issues and set to rest the ghost of the civil rights era." **Rep. John Conyers**

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## **MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE LEGISLATION**

- This bill requires the Department of Justice and FBI to consult with civil rights organizations, universities, and other entities that have also been gathering evidence in these cold cases and allows such organizations to apply for grants to support their investigations;
- Provides clearer direction and improved coordination between federal, state, and local law enforcement and the activists, advocates, and academics working on these issues;
- Establishes a public-private joint taskforce to coordinate the investigations;
- Strengthens the Department of Justice's reporting requirements;
- Eliminates the pre-1969 time limitation on investigations;
- Eliminates the sunset provision in the original bill;
- Requires the Department of Justice to review specific closed cases that warrant further investigation;
- Maintains the previous funding levels;
- Establishes the process to reopen, review, and update the public on the cases previously closed and explain the outcome of cases referred to the Department of the Justice; and
- Clarifies the law's intent.

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