

EMMETT TILL UNSOLVED CIVIL RIGHTS CRIMES REAUTHORIZATION ACT

What was the purpose of the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act?

In 2008, Congress passed the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2007 to effectuate a “sustained, well-coordinated, and well-funded effort to investigate and prosecute racially-motivated murders that occurred on or before December 31, 1969.”¹ The law established offices within the Department of Justice and FBI to investigate and prosecute unsolved civil rights era murders, required DOJ to provide regular reports on their progress, and authorized appropriations to support this work.

Why reauthorize this legislation?

The current legislation sunsets in FY 2017, but there are many additional victims of racially suspicious Civil Rights Era cases that warrant investigation.² Reauthorization will enable the DOJ to continue this critical mission and examine these crimes and additional crimes past the 2017 sunset in the original bill. Additional changes will address gaps in the previous bill by providing further transparency in the process, promoting collaboration between government and private sector, and allowing justice to be brought to other cold cases occurring in the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond.

What does the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act do?

- Reauthorize the existing offices within the FBI and Department of Justice, more clearly delineate the responsibility of the Deputy Criminal Chief at DOJ’s Civil Rights Division to carry out this mission, and provide for a joint task force for enhanced collaboration
- Require the Department of Justice and FBI to consult with civil rights organizations, universities, and other entities who have been engaged in this work, and allow such organizations to apply for grants
- Eliminate the pre-1970 time limitation on investigations
- Eliminate the sunset provision in the original bill
- Strengthen the Department of Justice’s reporting requirements
- Require the Department of Justice to review certain closed cases that warrant further investigation
- Maintain the previous funding levels

¹ Senate Judiciary Committee Report No. 110-88, pg. 2 (2007).

² “For the ghosts of the civil rights era, it is never too late for justice.” 2/27/2015. Available at <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/the-ghosts-the-civil-rights-era-it-never-too-late-justice>.