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Summary: 1969 MUSC nurses' aides strike

**HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

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**VERSIONS OF THIS BILL**

[02/05/2025](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126_2025-2026/prever/320_20250205.docx)

A senate RESOLUTION

TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THE courageous black hospital workers who organized, and carried out, the 1969 nurseS’ AIDES STRIKE at the medical university of south carolina.

Whereas, the 1969 nurses’ aides strike was considered by many to be the most disruptive labor battle since the 1930s. It was much more than a labor struggle; it was a struggle for civil rights. The catalyst for Black hospital workers to organize occurred when a white head nurse would not give five “nonprofessional” Black workers the customary access to patients’ charts. The Black workers therefore refused to work and were fired the next day; and

Whereas, the five asked Mary Moultrie, a Black nurse’s aide, to help them. She talked with Bill Saunders, a factory worker, activist, and community liaison with the local office of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and Isaiah Bennett, a veteran union organizer. In 1968, Mary Moultrie and a few associates began to organize a grassroots campaign to unionize the nurses’ aides at MCH. Moultrie, who grew up in Charleston, had spent several years working at a hospital in New York City. During her time in the North, she earned her Licensed Practical Nurse certificate. However, MCH refused to acknowledge her certification despite her experience, because of the color of her skin, and forced her to accept a low-paying nurse’s aide position; and

Whereas, at the time, there were no Black physicians or Black medical school students at the hospital. Black workers were all forced into low-paying manual jobs, such as maintenance and kitchen staff. The Black nurses’ aides made $1.30/hour, while their white counterparts made the federal minimum wage, $1.60/hour. Additionally, they were exposed to daily derogatory terms, such as “monkey wrenches,” and were denied access to the medical charts of patients for whom they were instructed to provide care, despite the danger this meant for the patients themselves; and

Whereas, after multiple attempts to have their complaints taken seriously, workers occupied the office of MCH President William McCord to demand that their voices be heard. An agreed-upon hospital meeting fell apart when dozens of uninvited workers arrived, McCord did not attend, and an administrator prohibited discussion of unions. Workers occupied McCord’s office until the Charleston police chief ordered them to leave. Twelve participants were fired: Moultrie, Louise Brown, Andrew Daniels, Rosalie Fields, Priscilla Gladden, Mary Grimes, Helen Husser, Margaret Kelly, Annie Morris Lee, Vera Smalls, Virginia Stanley, and Hazel White; and

Whereas, this sparked a strike nearly 400-strong that would last for 113 days, mobilizing up to 10,000 people for a protest on Mother’s Day. We honor the participants for having had the courage to fight for change; and

Whereas, further, we gratefully honor the late Coretta Scott King for her pivotal role in being the face of this boycott, and we express our deepest gratitude to the late Maude E. Callen, without whom there would have never been a Black nurse. Mrs. Callen was granted numerous awards during her lifetime, including the Order of the Palmetto, and quietly became the foundational pillar of all Black persons within the healthcare profession. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate:

That the members of the South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, remember and honor the courageous Black hospital workers who organized, and carried out, the 1969 nurses’ aides strike at the Medical University of South Carolina.

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