

1 WHEREAS, in a landmark civil rights case, Nelson represented the defendant's in
2 the case of *Lombard v. Louisiana* (subsequently *Louisiana v. Goldfinch, et al.*) a sit-in case
3 that occurred in Orleans Parish where demonstrators had been sentenced in state court to
4 ten-year jail terms for "criminal anarchy", a matter which he handled through all of
5 Louisiana's courts and argued before the United States Supreme Court with the ultimate
6 decision in favor of the defendants; and

7 WHEREAS, this was the first time a white attorney in the South, unaffiliated with
8 any civil rights organization, had represented an African American in a civil rights case
9 before the United States Supreme Court; and

10 WHEREAS, John Nelson also handled the suit to integrate Tulane University,
11 initially losing the suit after getting an earlier favorable judgment, when a second judge
12 rendered a negative decision but prompting Tulane to voluntarily desegregate; and

13 WHEREAS, he served as counsel for St. Augustine High School of New Orleans,
14 a de facto racially segregated black school, in its efforts to integrate interscholastic athletic
15 activities overseen by the Louisiana High School Athletic Association and he also
16 represented the Houma Indians of Terrebonne Parish, where a tri-racial pattern of
17 segregation existed and was successful in obtaining a federal court injunction and plan for
18 integration of the schools; and

19 WHEREAS, in 1960, Nelson was one of the organizers of the Save Our Schools
20 (SOS) movement in Louisiana, which organized resistance to the efforts to close public
21 schools in order to prevent integration; SOS carried on a widespread program of education
22 and a "car-lift" for children wishing to attend boycotted schools; with two other SOS
23 attorneys Nelson submitted an amicus brief in the St. Helena School closing case, heard
24 before the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana; he was also a
25 trustee of the Back to School Fund that assisted parents who lost employment because they
26 sent their children to integrated schools; and Nelson won a favorable suit brought against the
27 New Orleans Athletic Club by Thomas P. Perkins Jr., a young African American Harvard
28 student from New Orleans, who when home from university, was denied entrance and use
29 of the facilities even though Perkins was a member of the Harvard Club of Boston, which
30 had a reciprocal agreement with the athletic club; and

1 WHEREAS, Nelson was a founding member of the National Catholic Conference
2 for Interracial Justice, and later served as vice chairman on its legal committee; he also
3 served as a member of the board of directors of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations
4 and a member of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights
5 Commission; and

6 WHEREAS, John P. Nelson Jr. donated to the Amistad Research Center at Tulane
7 University, a collection of his papers which consist of 7.2 linear feet of materials arranged
8 into three series of materials related to integration in New Orleans and within the state of
9 Louisiana, General Materials (1957-1967), Public Service Organizations (1969-1973), and
10 Legal Cases (1960-1977); and

11 WHEREAS, the papers document Nelson's active participation in the civil rights
12 movement, school integration in New Orleans, and his work as an Assistant District
13 Attorney for Orleans Parish and includes 1,227 pieces of correspondence dated between
14 1957 and 1977; and

15 WHEREAS, the papers also include magazine articles, speeches, a proposal,
16 collected materials, notes, memoranda, agendas, reports, minutes, job descriptions,
17 applications, resumes, forms, and various legal documents; and

18 WHEREAS, John P. Nelson Jr. was a progressive voice for Louisiana, a well known,
19 highly respected, admired attorney, and citizen of Louisiana who left an indelible mark upon
20 the lives of all those who knew him; and

21 WHEREAS, the success of the state of Louisiana, the strength of our communities,
22 and the overall vitality of American Society depend, in great measure, upon people like
23 John P. Nelson Jr.

24 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby
25 commend, posthumously, John P. Nelson Jr. for his contributions to civil rights in Louisiana.

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part
of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Jerry J. Guillot.
