

Remarks for the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations

Subcommittee Members' Day

Representative Peter J. Visclosky (IN-01)

March 3, 2020

I would like to thank Chairman Quigley, Ranking Member Graves, and all the members of the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee for holding today's hearing. I would like to first take this moment to also thank you all for providing \$4 million to implement P.L. 115-426, the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Act, in the House's bill during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations cycle, as well as for fighting to retain \$2 million for this law in conference. The reason I am testifying today is to request that the Subcommittee again take action to provide \$4 million for this law in the upcoming fiscal year.

As you know, P.L. 115-426 requires the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to establish a collection of government records relating to "cold cases" from the Civil Rights era. Additionally, P.L. 115-426 establishes a Review Board to facilitate the review of these cases, transmission of documents to NARA, and determination of public disclosure of each case. That is why I am a proud supporter of P.L. 115-426 and why I believe that, in order to successfully implement this law, it is crucial that it receives proper annual funding.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that implementing this law would cost approximately \$2 million annually and \$10 million total over the five-year funding period.

Regrettably, this law did not receive any funding for its first year of enactment during FY 2019.

Thus, \$4 million is necessary in FY 2021 in order to properly fund the law's implementation for the fiscal year.

As you know, P.L. 115-426 came to fruition due to the diligent work of a group of students from Hightstown, New Jersey, who were determined to bring justice to the primarily African American families of lynching victims from the Civil Rights era. Since the passage of P.L. 110-344, the Emmett Till Act of 2007, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have investigated more than 100 lynching-related cases but have successfully prosecuted only one case. Specifically, most of the participants and witnesses of these cases are now deceased, which leads the agencies to rule most cases as “closed.” Because successful prosecution is primarily unavailable, we must focus our concerns on helping families achieve a measure of closure even if the full justice they deserve is no longer available.

Further, the importance of robust funding for P.L. 115-426 is even more evident as we have just concluded celebrating Black History Month and the value that African Americans have contributed to our country. Additionally, I am proud to note that on February 26, 2020, the House approved H.R. 35, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act. This long-overdue measure fervently condemns lynching as a federal hate crime. As you know, this measure was named after Emmett Till, a boy who was brutally lynched at the young age of 14 for nothing more than the color of his skin. Emmett Till’s death in 1955 provided a catalyst for the emerging Civil Rights Movement of which many of our colleagues selflessly participated in, not only for themselves but for the betterment of the United States. We cannot make the mistake of delaying the necessary funding to help remedy the other countless lynching incidents that have taken place in our country.

In conclusion, I would like to again thank the Subcommittee for allowing me to testify today. Fully funding P.L. 115-426 is one of the many ways that we can bring reparations to families of hateful discrimination. In order to continue moving forward and continue welcoming the growing diversity that composes the United States, we must not ignore the reprehensible acts of the past. Instead, we must shine a light on these tragedies for the betterment of our own understanding and for the sake of the families who have experienced immeasurable loss. I look forward to working with you on this and other efforts to create a more just and tolerant society.