

Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Board Member

**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION NO. 15-XXX
OF THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY,
FLORIDA, RECOGNIZING LOCAL TUSKEGEE AIRMEN**

**COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL SERVICES AND STUDENT AND SCHOOL
SUPPORT**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK: STUDENT, PARENT, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Prior to 1940, African Americans were prevented from flying for the United States military. Due to constant pressure from civil rights organizations and the black press, the United States military formed an all African-American pursuit squadron based in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1941. This elite group became known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

"Tuskegee Airmen" refers to all who were involved in the so-called "Tuskegee Experience," the Army Air Corps program to train African Americans to fly and maintain combat aircraft. The Tuskegee Airmen included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all the personnel who kept the planes in the air. This historic group includes, Lt. Col. Leo R. Gray; Judge Richard B. Rutledge; and Lt. Col. Eldridge F. Williams.

Retired Lt. Col. Leo Gray, was born in Boston in 1924. A trumpet player and track runner, he joined the Army in 1943. After a little more than a year in the Army, Lt. Col. Leo Gray graduated from the Tuskegee Army Air field as a Second Lieutenant, single engine pilot. Mr. Gray flew with arguably the most famous of the Tuskegee Airmen, the 332nd Fighter Group, fondly known as the Red Tails. The fighter group was given this name because they painted the tails of their airplanes bright red. Mr. Gray flew 15 combat missions for a total of 750 hours of flying time. Mr. Gray left active duty in 1946, but remained in the United States Air Force Reserves until 1984.

Lieutenant Colonel Gray served our country for more than 40 years and earned numerous honors including the Coveted Air Medal with one Oak Leaf cluster and a Presidential Unit Citation. Throughout his service Mr. Gray earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1950, a Master's degree from the University of Nebraska in 1952, and did post graduate work at the University of Maryland from 1962-1964. After leaving active duty, Lt. Col. Leo Gray began his 30 year career with United States Department of Agriculture in 1953.

Judge Richard Rutledge enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps in 1941 and was sent to the Tuskegee Air Field. Judge Rutledge was one of the first African-American airplane mechanics to be trained at Tuskegee and was part of the famous 332nd

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Fighter Group under the legendary Black Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. During his service, Judge Rutledge served in North Africa in 1943 and was promoted from private to sergeant. In addition, Judge Rutledge went to the South Pacific and took part in the invasion of the Palau Islands.

Judge Rutledge became one of the first African Americans to be commissioned in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a warrant officer. After his years of dedicated service to our country, Mr. Rutledge graduated from New York University and Brooklyn Law School. Following a 34-year career in private law practice, he was elected to the New York Courts and eventually served as a judge on the New York Supreme Court

Eldridge Williams, is an original Tuskegee Airmen. In 1940, a year prior to the beginning of the training of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, Mr. Williams applied for aviation cadet training. After applying, Mr. Williams was called to take a physical at the Kansas City airport and was rejected for a rare condition resulting from a severe and normally fatal head injury called cupping of the optic disc. Given the racial climate at this time, Mr. Williams was kept from serving in the air Force because he was African American and not because of this injury.

Despite facing grave injustice, Mr. Williams entered the engineer training battalion, and was later promoted to sergeant. In 1942, Mr. Williams' dream of becoming a Tuskegee Airmen was fulfilled when he was commissioned a second lieutenant. Over the next four years Mr. Williams would remain a member of the Tuskegee Airmen until 1946. After years with the Airmen, Mr. Williams went on to become a director of physical fitness at Tuskegee Army Air Field. Mr. Williams is 1941 graduate of Xavier University in New Orleans, LA., where he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Physical Education. Following his military career, Mr. Williams served as director of personnel for Miami Dade County Public Schools. Mr. Williams is also a lifetime member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

We honor these men and their comrades for fighting through racism and bigotry, by showing their counterparts and the world that African-Americans can succeed in battle. Their lives are examples to us all that despite unspeakable odds, success can be obtained through hard work, dedication and the will to achieve.

ACTION PROPOSED BY

DR. DOROTHY BENDROSS-MINDINGALL: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, approve Resolution No. 15-XXX of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, recognizing local Tuskegee Airmen.