

Dear Senator

:

My friend of more than 30 years, Morris Abram, has been nominated for a post on the United States Civil Rights Commission and I wish it were possible for me to be present in person to testify before the Judiciary Committee in support of his candidacy.

Mr. Abram supported the King family during its period of great tribulations. As my son's widow Coretta Scott King writes in her book "My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr." of the time when my son was being handcuffed and chained to be driven to Reidsville prison and placed with hardened criminals in 1960:

"But Daddy King was thinking in terms of practical things -- of finding lawyers who could get Martin out of Jail. He asked me to go with him to see the well-known and respected lawyer, Morris Abram, who had become a friend of ours during our struggle and who had been very helpful with civil-rights cases.

As I was getting dressed to go to see Mr. Abram, the telephone rang. The person at the other end said, 'May I speak to Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. Just a minute, Mrs. King, for Senator Kennedy.'"

Morris Abram, from the time he arrived in Atlanta in 1948 was in the forefront of the public battle against racial discrimination. He joined Elbert Tuttle, later to

become the Chief Judge of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, in filing a brief in the late 1940's attacking the Georgia Voter Registration Act, which had been enacted to get blacks off, and keep them off, the voting rolls. He then turned his attention to attacking the County Unit System, the principle purpose of which was to undercut what black votes could be cast in those days. He filed lawsuit after lawsuit until he finally prevailed fourteen long years later.

Now I know Mr. Abram to be a blunt and candid man, what he says he believes in. I recall the time when he spoke before the Hungry Club, a group of black business and professional men which met on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. The time must have been in the early 1950's. Mr. Abram pointed out that blacks were fairly able to vote in Fulton County (Atlanta) but too few were registered and voting. Some people criticized him for saying that but I got up and told the group that I thought that Mr. Abram was right.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested for sitting in Rich's Dining Room with some of his young followers Mr. Abram was highly instrumental in getting them all released

intervening with the Mayor of Atlanta, the late William B. Hartsfield, the head of Rich's Department Store and the Soliciter General of Fulton County Criminal Court.

In 1963, Mr. Abram went down to Americus, Sumter County, Georgia and got five civil rights workers -- my son's supporters -- out of jail with the help of a three-judge Federal Court. All these kids were being held without bail charged with, of all things, "sedition."

I am interested in black education and so is Mr. Abram. From 1970-1979, I think longer than any man, he served as Chairman of the United Negro College Fund which gets the money to help keep some 41 black colleges going. Just this year he was elected as an Honorary Member of the Board of that organization.

I do not believe that many southern white people have had a longer experience in support of civil rights than Mr. Abram and whatever he does on the Commission he will do on the basis of principle and conscience. I do not believe anybody could ask anymore. I hope the Senate will confirm him without delay.

Respectfully your,

Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr.