

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 109

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

INTRODUCED JUNE 20, 1996

By Assemblymen STEELE, T. SMITH, DiGaetano and Doria

1 **AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** condemning the recent burnings of churches in
2 the South and calling for Congressional hearings.

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4 **WHEREAS**, Since January of 1995, more than 30 church fires, in seven
5 southern states, have been under active investigation by federal officials; and

6 **WHEREAS**, Many of these churches are small, with predominantly African-
7 American congregations, often located in poor, rural areas; and

8 **WHEREAS**, These churches are irreplaceable buildings, some more than a
9 century old, thought of as shared heirlooms, built by hand; and

10 **WHEREAS**, The burnings of these churches, which represent hope, dreams,
11 and beliefs, are particularly heinous because the fires summon nightmares
12 of past terrorism against persons of African-American descent; and

13 **WHEREAS**, The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the Federal
14 Bureau of Investigation and local law enforcement, as well as the Justice
15 Department's civil rights division, are searching for evidence to determine
16 whether these acts of arson are a conspiracy of hate or random acts of
17 malice; and

18 **WHEREAS**, There has been a wave of vandalism, burning and firebombing,
19 reminiscent of the abominable attacks during the height of the anti-
20 integration era more than 30 years ago, resulting in more than 40 cases of
21 arson or vandalism at churches since 1990 under investigation; and

22 **WHEREAS**, Federal and local investigators report that they lack evidence of
23 any centralized or organized campaign of racial terrorism; and

24 **WHEREAS**, The failure of the federal government to make headway in
25 determining the cause of these acts of arson is outrageous and
26 unacceptable; and

27 **WHEREAS**, The members of the congregations of these churches, perhaps
28 targets of religious or racial hatred, should not become victims of a national
29 passivity possibly attributable to a preference by many Americans not to
30 believe that religious or racial bigotry exists; now, therefore,

31 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

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33 1. This House condemns the action of those individuals responsible for the
34 atrocious burnings of the more than 30 churches in our southern states.

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