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Retired Faculty Member and Former S.C. Rep. Bessie Moody-Lawrence Dies

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Retired Faculty Member and Former S.C. Rep. Bessie Moody-Lawrence Dies

Quick Facts

- A pioneer as the second African-American woman to serve in the S.C. General Assembly from York County, Moody-Lawrence was the first and only Winthrop professor to serve as a state legislator.



Bessie Moody-Lawrence

ROCK HILL, S.C. – Retired **S.C. Rep. Bessie Moody-Lawrence**, a Winthrop faculty member who got into politics because of her mother's poor health coverage, passed away today. She was 71.

She had said she didn't set out to run for political office but recognized that her mother had insufficient health coverage as a retired teacher and fought to get it corrected.

A pioneer as the second African-American woman to serve in the **S.C. General Assembly** from York County, she was the first and only Winthrop professor to serve as a state legislator.

President Anthony DiGiorgio said: "Bessie was part of a generation of African-American leaders who re-defined what was possible, especially for African-American students, through her life's example. She cared deeply about education, about equal pay for women, about her community and about the next generation of leaders emerging in South Carolina. That will be her legacy, both here at Winthrop and across the state."

First elected in 1993, **Moody-Lawrence** commuted to Columbia until 2007 representing the Rock Hill area and fighting for education and for the poor and underprivileged.

With approval from the president and board of trustees, the associate professor in education balanced her schedule to work as a faculty member and a legislator in the General Assembly, which meets from January to June. By teaching four courses in the fall, **Moody-Lawrence** taught only one course in the spring and then taught during the summer session.

The Chester County native served on the **House of Representatives' Education Committee**, the **Higher Education subcommittee**, as chair of the **Black Caucus' Education Committee** and as director of legislative internships for students from historically black colleges.

Moody-Lawrence taught in Rock Hill schools for several years before joining Winthrop as an associate professor in 1973 where she helped prepare future teachers for elementary education. One of the first African-Americans to receive tenure at Winthrop, she retired in 2004.

Moody-Lawrence earned a bachelor's degree from **South Carolina State College** in 1962 and taught science in the Spartanburg school district. She earned a certificate of education in 1967 and a master's in education degree in 1971, both from **Winthrop**, and later a doctorate from the **University of South Carolina**.

She said in **Winthrop's faculty/staff newsletter, FYI**, in 2003 that it was important for her to improve

the human condition and to not be a part of something that discriminates. "I find my work very rewarding, and I feel good about it," she said.

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