

STATEMENT OF POLICY BY COFO - July 10, 1964

A suit has been filed today in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi seeking the appointment of federal commissioners to sit in every county of the State of Mississippi to assure the safety of the Negro citizens of Mississippi and the students and others engaged in the Mississippi Summer Project.

In filing this suit and calling upon the judicial branch of the United States Government to grant relief, we are invoking a statute originally enacted in 1866, in the midst of the Reconstruction Era, which authorizes federal courts to grant the relief here sought for exactly the type of lawlessness and violence presently existing in Mississippi.

COFO believes that every branch of the Government should exercise its maximum powers to protect the members of the Mississippi summer project as well as all persons, Negro and white, seeking to enforce the civil rights of the Negro citizens of Mississippi.

First, the Executive Branch of the Government has in fact assigned forces to investigate the disappearance of the three civil rights workers in Neshoba County. This investigation must continue, but protection for the future is equally important. We call on the President to assign United States Marshals in sufficient numbers to prevent any future attacks upon the young people involved in the Mississippi summer project and others associated with them.

Second, by filing this lawsuit, we have called upon the Judicial Branch of the Government to exercise the great and sweeping powers granted to it by statute.

Third, the Legislative Branch of the Government also has enormous powers. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a great step forward. It is high time now, however, for a joint Congressional Committee to be set up to investigate what has been transpiring in Mississippi to cause a denial to the Negro citizens of that state of their basic constitutional right to vote.

No branch of the Government is devoid of responsibility. COFO, by filing this suit, gives notice that it will continue to call upon all branches to exercise their powers.