



Claudette Colvin and attorney Phillip Ensler plan to file a petition this week to clear Colvin's record in Montgomery. PROVIDED

Claudette Colvin to try to clear her name

Civil rights pioneer wants court record in Montgomery expunged

Brad Harper Montgomery Advertiser | USA TODAY NETWORK

Claudette Colvin was 15 when she was arrested and given indefinite probation for refusing to surrender her seat on a segregated Montgomery city bus, nine months before Rosa Parks. Now she's 82 and a resident of an assisted living facility in Birmingham, and she's lived her life with that probation, which was never lifted.

That could be about to change. Colvin plans to file a petition Tuesday in Montgomery Juvenile Court to have the records associated with her 1955 arrest expunged, attorney Phillip Ensler said. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down segregated busing the year after Colvin's arrest, and she was one of four plaintiffs in that case.

Fred Gray, her original attorney, will be beside Colvin as she files the petition Tuesday.

Ensler said the push has been led by Colvin's sister, Gloria Laster. He said because she was placed on "indefinite probation," her family was always fearful when she came back to visit Montgomery and did not realize the probation ended. Ensler said they want the court to formally clear her name.

"No one ever told her or her family once she became an adult, 'Hey



Colvin boarded a Montgomery, Alabama, bus in 1955 and was arrested when she refused to give up her seat. PROVIDED

"No one ever told her or her family once she became an adult, 'Hey you're no longer on probation.'"

Phillip Ensler
Attorney for Claudette Colvin

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Claudette Colvin, right, answers questions from students at Booker T. Washington Magnet High School in Montgomery in 2005. Colvin was attending the school in 1955 when she was arrested for not giving up her seat on a Montgomery city bus. MICKEY WELSH/ADVERTISER

Colvin

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you're no longer on probation," Ensler said. "... It made her and her family feel like she's always going to be under the eye of the government."

Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed, Montgomery County District Attorney Daryl Bailey and state Rep. Merika Coleman all plan to be on hand at the filing, Ensler said.

Colvin was charged at the time with assaulting an officer as she was forcibly removed from the bus. She told the Montgomery Advertiser in 2019 that she didn't remember attacking police, but she remembers other details — like white officers debating her bra size and the sound of the key locking her in the cell.

"As a teenager, that's when I became

really scared," Colvin said at the time. "In an old Western, when the bandits are put in the jail, you can hear the sound of the key go 'click.' I could hear the sound when the jailer locked it. I knew I was locked in, and I couldn't get out. I started crying. I started reciting the 23rd Psalm."

Before filing to clear her record, Colvin will join Gray at the Tuesday dedication of a Montgomery street that's being renamed in his honor.

Colvin's former attorney grew up on Jeff Davis Avenue in Montgomery, a street named for the president of the Confederacy. The Montgomery City Council unanimously voted in October to rename it Fred D. Gray Avenue, despite potentially violating a state law that was enacted in 2017 to protect Confederate monuments.

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