

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL PRESS CONFERENCE

**Adam's Mark Hotel
1200 Hampton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201**

Wednesday, December 17, 2003 - 11:00 a.m.

**ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON-WILLIAMS
RETURNS TO SOUTH CAROLINA**

Senator Strom Thurmond's African American Daughter Finds Peace at Last

Columbia, South Carolina – Essie Mae Washington-Williams, the long rumored African American daughter of the late South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond will hold a national press conference at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, December 17, 2003 at the regal Adam's Mark Hotel in Columbia, South Carolina. The press conference is designed to finally bring closure to the story that has captivated the south for much of the last century. Senator James Strom Thurmond, the legendary 100 year-old senator from South Carolina, passed away this past June after serving nearly seventy-five years as an elected official. Always controversial, the late senator had an even more fascinating private life. As one of the Old South's most passionate segregationists, former Governor and Senator Strom Thurmond preached even as a presidential candidate the benefits of segregation and the ills and conflicts of race-mixing in America. He was one of the strongest and most vocal advocates of segregation in the history of the nation. Yet, the conflict between his personal life and his very public stance on segregation were at constant odds with one another for most of his lifetime.

Strom Thurmond, it was reported and rumored for many years, fathered Essie Mae Washington, when he was 22 years old and still quite youthful. Carrie Butler was a young worker for the Thurmond family. She was 16 at the time of Essie's birth. The daughter, Essie Mae Washington, was named for her aunt Essie and went to live with another aunt and uncle in Pennsylvania who gave her the name Washington. She was quietly moved to Pennsylvania several months after her birth. It has been said that the Thurmond family deliberately arranged the move in order to keep Essie out of the public eye. When she was older, while attending an aunt's funeral in Edgefield, Carrie took young Essie back to meet her father. She was told in then Attorney Thurmond's law office, "This is your father." Mr. Thurmond responded, "What a lovely daughter." Young Essie never forgot that day. Later, after arranging for her college education at South Carolina State, the Governor would visit her at the college from time to time.

Although it was rarely spoken directly, it was common knowledge at South Carolina State that Essie Mae Washington was the daughter of Governor Strom Thurmond. Eventually, Essie Mae Washington-Williams would graduate from California State University at Los Angeles with her B.A. and subsequently earned her Masters from the University of Southern California.

For years thereafter, Essie Mae Washington would visit her father and renowned segregationist Strom Thurmond in the private quarters of his senate office in Washington D.C. She would always be given money for support and then chauffeur driven to the train station for her trip back home. All of the Washington and South Carolina staffers knew who she was to the Governor and later Senator Thurmond.

Now, 78 years young and living a quiet life in Los Angeles, Essie Mae Washington-Williams has four successful children, over a dozen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. She has a lifetime of stories and reflections on being the daughter of one of the most colorful southern figures of our time, a story so strong that it has the capability of changing the complete complexion of American history. Widowed from the late attorney, Julius Williams, she has remained quiet and dignified about her life until now.

Essie Mae Washington-Williams will unveil the chapters of her life beginning Wednesday, December 17, 2003. She will start from the beginning in what is sure to become an all American classic in book form and certainly a monumental epic for television or screen.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and attendance.