



Anita R. Williams
1891-1983
Pioneer Social Worker

Born in Baltimore to Samuel F. and Mary V. Williams, the family attended St. Pius V Church. She was educated in the City's segregated public schools through the eighth grade and later received special permission to take courses at Johns Hopkins University and Mercy Hospital. Her commitment to public service, an important part of which was the advancement of civil rights, was instilled at home. From an early age she volunteered at family and child welfare agencies and in 1921 she helped to organize the Bernard Atkins Organization, which promoted the education of black Catholic youth through a scholarship fund. The following year she was approached by Fr. Edwin Leonard, director of the Bureau of Catholic Charities, who encouraged her to take a position as a case-worker at the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a lay-run charitable organization. In 1923 she began her career with Catholic Charities, making her the first black Catholic social worker in the country. During the Great Depression, as a member of the delegation lent by Catholic Charities to the City to help organize a program for families in need known as the Baltimore Emergency Relief Committee, she became the first black supervisor of a Baltimore City Agency. She returned to her position at Catholic Charities in 1936, where she remained until her retirement in 1961.

Other firsts she attained in her career included being the first black person to serve on the Maryland State Council of Social Workers and board of the Council of Social Agencies and the first woman to serve on the board of Provident Hospital (1894-1986), the City's first black-owned medical facility, where she chaired the nurses training program for many years. She was a charter member of the Baltimore Urban League and NAACP and a founding member and president of the Catholic Interracial Council.

She served on a number of other health, welfare, and human relations boards and was the recipient of numerous awards and honors in recognition of her exemplary career, including having a building named after her at the Montrose School for Girls in Reistertown, an institution she was affiliated with for more than 19 years, and being awarded the papal medal Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice in 1958, one of the highest honors offered by the Catholic Church. When reflecting on a life that was shaped by her dedication and commitment to public service, Miss Williams observed: "I was never afraid to get involved."