



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Press Release: Senate Dems Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins Honors Civil Rights Pioneer & Centenarian Dr. Olivia Hooker of Greenburgh During Black History Month

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS February 24, 2015

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**(Albany - February 24th)** In honor of Dr. Olivia Hooker's 100th Birthday which falls during Black History Month, Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins introduced a Senate Resolution and nominated Dr. Hooker for a Lifetime Achievement Award from the New York State Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators. The award and a copy of the Resolution were presented to Dr. Hooker during an event in her honor held by the

Yonkers Human Rights Commission at the Hudson River Museum on February 21st.

The Senate Resolution recognizes Dr. Hooker's 100th Birthday on February 12th, and also details her extraordinary life and accomplishments. The Lifetime Achievement Award from the New York State Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators is presented to, "an individual who has spent a lifetime accepting responsibility for social, political and economic empowerment with communities of color. In essence, a person who has been an inspiration and a catalyst for change."

"At 100 years old, one cannot help but be in awe of Dr. Olivia Hooker and her achievements as a civil and equal rights pioneer," said Senator Stewart-Cousins. Dr. Hooker tells her story of surviving the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, what history now refers to as the worst race riot in this country. She was six years old when the thriving black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma where her family lived, and her father had a store, was completely destroyed by members of the surrounding white community. 300 people were killed. Dr. Hooker and other survivors took the fight for reparations all the way to Congress and federal court in the 1980's, forcing the state to formally recognize what occurred.

Senator Stewart-Cousins added, "During World War II, she was part of an organized effort to overturn the prohibition of black women from joining the Armed Services, and became the first African-American female to serve in the United States Coast Guard. After the war, her love of learning and willingness to help others led her to pursue a doctorate degree in psychology at a time when she was one of two African-American female students in Phd the program."

Senator Stewart-Cousins concluded, "Dr. Hooker has dedicated her life to helping others, during a lengthy career as a psychologist and professor. Her willingness to share her life story brings Black History and American history to life, so that each generation can

understand why the Tulsa Race Riot is an important part of the fight for racial justice and equality in our country.”

Dr. Hooker’s biography is a rich one that is detailed in the Senate Resolution in honor of her 100th Birthday. She earned her bachelor’s degree at Ohio State University and became a teacher, before joining the United States Coast Guard during World War II, becoming the first African-American female to serve in active duty. After being discharged, she went on to earn her Master’s Degree in Psychological Services from Columbia University at a time when few women of color were given the opportunity. She became a psychologist at Albion State School, then Senior Psychologist at the Bedford Hills Prison for Women. She earned her PhD from the University of Rochester, where she was one of two African-American female students.

Dr. Hooker served as Director of Psychology and Associate Administrator for 22 years at New York’s Kennedy Child Study Center, and concurrently, taught in the Graduate School at Fordham University, retiring as an Associate Professor in 1985.

A Greenburgh resident, she is the recipient of numerous awards and accolades. In 2012, Senator Stewart-Cousins inducted her into the State Senate’s Veterans Hall of Fame. In 2011, Dr. Hooker was named to the Westchester Hall of Fame and in 2012, was honored with the illustrious Trailblazer Award. At age 97, Professor Emerita Olivia J. Hooker became the oldest member ever inducted into Psi Chi, the esteemed International Honor Society in Psychology.

Senator Stewart-Cousins echoed the words from the resolution in stating, “This distinguished woman has experienced the incredible joys and sorrows characteristic of and reserved for those with the stamina and courage to savor a full life; she has truly enriched the lives of those around her, including myself, through her joyous and sincere love for others and through the quiescent charm and wisdom which comes only from a fullness of years.”