

2009-J4915

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION mourning the death of Dorothy Height, a leader of the African-American and women's civil rights movements

WHEREAS, On Tuesday, April 20, 2010, Dorothy Height, a champion of women and minorities, and President Emerita of the National Council of Negro Women, died at the age of 98; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Height had a career in civil rights that spanned nearly 80 years, from anti-lynching protests in the early 1930s to being an honored witness at the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009; he called her "the godmother of the civil rights movement and hero to so many Americans"; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Height regularly worked on projects of national significance alongside the "Big Six" male civil rights leaders; in 1963 she sat next to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during his epochal "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington; a prizewinning orator and one of the March's chief organizers, Ms. Height was not asked to speak that day, although many other leaders - all men - addressed that day's crowd; and

WHEREAS, A star scholar, Dorothy Height was accepted at Barnard College in 1929, only to be told by the dean that she could not enroll that year because the quota for Negro students had already been met; she earned a bachelor's degree in education and a master's in psychology from New York University; 75 years after being turned away from Barnard, the college awarded Ms. Height its highest honor, the Barnard Medal of Distinction; and

WHEREAS, After serving as a caseworker with the New York City Welfare Department, Dorothy Height became assistant executive director of the Harlem YWCA in the late 1930s, catching the attention of the international news media by speaking out against the "slave markets" exploiting

black women working as domestic day workers; and

WHEREAS, At the age of 25, Ms. Height became a member of the National Council of Negro Women and served as its president from 1957 to 1997, overseeing programs ranging from voting rights, to poverty and AIDS; and WHEREAS, In 1946, Dorothy Height oversaw the desegregation of the YWCA nationwide; in 1965, she founded the Y's Center for Racial Justice, which she led until 1977; and

WHEREAS, From 1946 to 1957, Ms. Height was the president of Delta Sigma Theta, an international sorority of black women; and, along with Gloria Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan and others, Ms. Height founded the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971; and

WHEREAS, In 1994, President Bill Clinton awarded Dorothy Height the Presidential Medal of Freedom; in 2004, she was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit, imbued with a sense of compassion, and comforted by a loving family, Dorothy Height leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all she served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to remember Dorothy Height as past President of the National Council of Negro Women, a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus, civil rights grande dame, presidential advisor and champion of the rights of women; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the National Council of Negro Women and to Dorothy Height's sister, Anthanette Aldridge of New York City.