

2011-J452

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION paying tribute to the life and accomplishments of Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, surgical pioneer of open heart surgery and its sterilization procedures

WHEREAS, With February being Black History Month, it is a time to reflect on the struggles and victories of African Americans throughout our country's history and to recognize their numerous valuable contributions to society; and

WHEREAS, Daniel Hale Williams was born on January 18, 1856, in Hollidsburg, Pennsylvania; he was the fifth of seven children born to Daniel and Sarah Williams; and

WHEREAS, Daniel Hale Williams's father was a barber and moved the family to Annapolis, Maryland, but died shortly thereafter of tuberculosis; Daniel's mother realized she could not manage the entire family and sent some of the children to live with relatives; Daniel was apprenticed to a shoemaker in Baltimore, but soon moved away to join his mother who had relocated to Rockford, Illinois; and

WHEREAS, Daniel Hale Williams later moved to Edgerton, Wisconsin, where he joined his sister and opened his own barber shop; after moving to nearby Janesville, he became fascinated with a local physician and decided to follow his path; and

WHEREAS, After following the example of his older brother studying law for a short time, Daniel Hale Williams began working as an apprentice to the physician, Dr. Henry Palmer for two years and in 1880, entered what is now known as Northwestern University Medical School; after graduation from Northwestern in 1883, he opened his own medical office in Chicago, Illinois; and

WHEREAS, Because of primitive social and medical circumstances existing in that era, much of Dr. Williams's early medical practice called

for him to treat patients in their homes, including conducting occasional surgeries on kitchen tables; in doing so, he utilized many of the emerging antiseptic, sterilization procedures of the day and thereby gained a reputation for professionalism; he was soon appointed as a surgeon on the staff of the South Side Dispensary and then a clinical instructor in Anatomy at Northwestern University; and

WHEREAS, On January 23, 1891, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams established the Provident Hospital and Training School Association, a three story building which held 12 beds and served members of the community as a whole; the school also served to train African American nurses and utilized doctors of all races; within its first year, 189 patients were treated at Provident Hospital and of those, 141 saw a complete recovery, 23 had recovered significantly, three had seen changes in their condition and 22 had died; and

WHEREAS, For a brand new hospital, at that time, to see an 87% success rate was phenomenal considering the financial and health conditions of the patient, along with the primitive conditions of most hospitals; much can be attributed to Dr. Williams's insistence on the highest standards concerning procedures and sanitary conditions; in 1889, he was appointed to the Illinois State Board of Health and one year later set forth to create an interracial hospital; and

WHEREAS, Two and a half years later, on July 9, 1893, a young African American man named James Cornish, was injured in a bar fight, stabbed in the chest with a knife; upon being transported to Provident Hospital, he was coming closer to death, having lost a great deal of blood and having already gone into shock; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Williams was faced with the choice of opening the man's chest and possibly operating internally when that was almost unheard of

in that particular day and age; internal operations were unheard of because any entrance into the chest or abdomen of a patient would almost surely bring with it resulting infection and therefore death; Dr.

Williams then made the decision to operate and opened the man's chest;
and

WHEREAS, Dr. Williams saw the damage to the man's pericardium (sac surrounding the heart) and sutured it, and then applied antiseptic procedures before closing his chest; fifty-one days later, James Cornish walked out of Provident Hospital completely recovered and would go on to live for another fifty years; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, Dr. Williams was so busy with other matters, he did not bother to document the event and others made claims to have first achieved the feat of performing open heart surgery; fortunately, local newspapers of that day did spread the news and Dr. Williams received the acclaim he deserved; and

WHEREAS, It should be noted however that while Dr. Williams is known as the first person to perform an open heart surgery, it is actually more noteworthy that he was the first surgeon to open the chest cavity successfully without the patient dying of infection; his procedures would therefore be used as standards for future internal surgeries; and

WHEREAS, In February of 1894, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams was appointed as Chief Surgeon at the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C. and reorganized the hospital, creating seven medical and surgical departments, setting up pathological and bacteriological units, establishing a biracial staff of highly qualified doctors and nurses and established an internship program; recognition of his efforts and their success came when doctors from all over the country traveled to Washington to view the hospital and to sit in on surgery performed there; and

WHEREAS, Upon his retirement, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams had bestowed upon him numerous honors and awards; he received honorary degrees from Howard and Wilberforce Universities, was named a charter member of the American College of Surgeons and was a member of the Chicago Surgical Society; Dr. Williams died on August 4, 1931, having set standards and examples for surgeons, both Black and White, for many years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to pay tribute to the life and accomplishments of Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, surgical pioneer of open heart surgery and its sterilization procedures.