

2013-J4175

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Cleveland Hill School Fire in the Town of Cheektowaga, on March 31, 2014

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to take note of significant events that represent turning points in our distinctive history, and which are indelibly etched in the saga of our great Nation; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is moved to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Cleveland Hill School Fire in the Town of Cheektowaga; the Cleveland Hill Union Free School District will hold a Remembrance Ceremony to honor the victims and heroes of this tragedy on Saturday, March 29, 2014; and

WHEREAS, March 31, 2014, marks the 60th anniversary of the Cleveland Hill School Fire in the Town of Cheektowaga, New York, which claimed the lives of fifteen sixth-grade children and injured at least 19 others; and

WHEREAS, One of the worst school fires in New York State, the Cleveland Hill School Fire resulted in a nationwide reflection on school building construction requirements; and

WHEREAS, On March 31, 1954, an undetected fire burned through the walls and tore through the corridor of a wood-framed, one-story, eight-room annex of Cleveland Hill School, causing panic among students and faculty; and

WHEREAS, With the corridor impassable, courageous teachers immediately sprang into action, directing children to break through school windows with any items available to hand, including chairs; the teachers then began to lift children out of the windows, allowing most to escape to safety; and

WHEREAS, Disastrously, many windows were either too small to fit through or simply would not open, creating a deadly situation for the sixth grade class of Mr. Thomas Griffin, who were attending music class with Mrs. Melba Y. Seibold; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Melba Seibold heroically saved 24 children from the fire, and in the process received severe burns, suffered from smoke inhalation, and broke several vertebrae while jumping out the window; and

WHEREAS, Another hero of the Cleveland Hill School Fire was 11-year-old student Blaine Poss, who pushed three children to safety before returning to help his girlfriend; he perished when a wall collapsed on him; and

WHEREAS, Tragically, fifteen children were unable to escape or suffered from injuries that would prove fatal; they were: Bruce Brand, Verna Bagley, Marlene Dupont, Michael Hause, Elizabeth Lies, John Mendofik, Blaine Poss, Reba Smith, Patricia Steger, Barbara Watkins, Patricia Blendowski, Donald Kelleher, Marlene Miller, Suzanne Jors, and George Hoffman; and

WHEREAS, The heroic action of Mrs. Melba Seibold and her colleagues and other students resulted in the survival of 1,650 students and 150 faculty members, while firefighters bravely rushed into the inferno with no regard for their own safety; and

WHEREAS, In the aftermath of the Cleveland Hill School Fire, many changes were made to increase the safety of school buildings; there was a national movement away from wooden-framed school buildings and, today in New York State, regulations require rescue windows in classrooms to have a minimum 6-square-foot opening; and

WHEREAS, The Cleveland Hill School Fire was the last time a public school child died in a school fire in the State of New York, evidence of a painful lesson well-learned; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that when events of such historic significance are brought to our attention, they should be

recognized by all citizens of this great Empire State; now, therefore be
it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to
commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Cleveland Hill School Fire in
the Town of Cheektowaga; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be tran-
smitted to the Cleveland Hill Union Free School District.