

2021-J738

Senate Resolution No. 738

BY: Senator RYAN

MOURNING the death of Madeline Davis, trailblazing
gay and lesbian activist, historian, distinguished
citizen and devoted member of her community

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to
citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavor
served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this
great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis of Amherst, New York, died on Wednesday,
April 28, 2021, at the age of 80; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis, known as a lesbian legend, was a longtime
activist for gay rights; she blazed a trail for the understanding and
acceptance of the LGBTQ community as a teacher, stage performer, author
and historian; and

WHEREAS, She was a founding member and president of the first gay
liberation organization in Western New York, the Mattachine Society of
the Niagara Frontier; and

WHEREAS, In 1971, she delivered a speech at the first gay march on
Albany; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis taught the first course on lesbianism in the nation at the University at Buffalo; she was also a founding member of Hag Theater, the first all-lesbian theater company in the United States; she also acted in several of its productions; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis and University at Buffalo professor Dr. Elizabeth L. Kennedy researched and authored a landmark account of the lives of gay working women in Buffalo, "Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community"; and

WHEREAS, Published in 1994, "Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community" received the Lambda Literary Award, the Ruth Benedict Award for urban anthropology and the Jessie Bernard Award from the American Sociological Association; and

WHEREAS, Her research became the foundation for what has become the Dr. Madeline Davis LGBTQ Archive of Western New York at SUNY Buffalo State and she served as its director; and

WHEREAS, Born on July 7, 1940, in Buffalo, New York, Madeline D. Davis was the oldest of three children and grew up the East Side; her father was an assembly line worker for Ford and her mother, a homemaker, had gone to nursing school; and

WHEREAS, She was a 1958 graduate of Bennett High School, where she was an honor student and worked all four years on the yearbook committee; and

WHEREAS, When she was a student at Bennett, she was hired to put books away in the North Jefferson Branch Library, a job she loved; she was thrilled to be able to hold the potential for learning in her hands; and

WHEREAS, While she was attended the University at Buffalo on a scholarship, Madeline Davis worked as a page in the college's Lockwood Library; and

WHEREAS, After earning a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in library science, she began working for the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library and became its chief conservator, overseeing the arrival and repair of tens of thousands of books and other materials; she directed a department of approximately 30 people; and

WHEREAS, During college, Madeline Davis adopted a beatnik style and began folk singing; she performed in coffeehouses in Buffalo, New York City, Toronto, Seattle and San Francisco.; she went on to be the lead singer in a jazz-rock group, the New Chicago Lunch, and later formed the Madeline Davis Group; and

WHEREAS, She became aware of her attraction to women in the 1960s, but the first time she got married, it was to a man; he was tolerant of her sexuality, but the coupe broke up for other reasons; and

WHEREAS, When Madeline Davis married again in 1995, her partner Wendy Smiley, was a telephone company telecommunications technician; although the wedding was beautiful, same sex marriage was not yet legal in New York State; and

WHEREAS, Madeline and Wendy repeated their vows four more times, in a pagan ceremony in Cherry Creek, in a civil ceremony in Vermont in 1997, in a ceremony legal in Canada at Two Hearts Wedding Chapel in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in 2006, and finally back in Temple Beth Zion in 2011, after New York approved same-sex marriages; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis began concentrated research into local

lesbian history in 1978 when she taught a course at the University at Buffalo with Dr. Kennedy while she was working on a second master's degree in American studies; that led to the founding of the Buffalo Women's Oral History Project and a 14-year-long effort collecting and compiling interviews with 45 older lesbians; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the Buffalo History Museum presented Madeline Davis with its Owen Augspurger Award for her work in preserving Erie County heritage; and

WHEREAS, At the time of her death, Madeline Davis was collecting oral histories of the elders in Buffalo's LGBTQ community, accompanied by photos by Keith Gemerek; and

WHEREAS, She also wrote numerous articles on sexuality and women's history, along with short stories and poetry; and

WHEREAS, Her work as a political activist continued with the Mattachine Society in the 1970s, when she invited political candidates to discuss gay issues for the first time and challenged the Buffalo police over entrapment and raids on gay bars; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis organized a Pride workshop in 1973, which evolved into PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), assisting those who support LGBT people; more recently, she was Vice President for community liaison for Stonewall Democrats; and

WHEREAS, In 1971, she recorded the nation's first gay anthem, "Stonewall Nation" and composed 45 songs, most with gay or lesbian themes; for many years, she organized benefit concerts for the gay community and performed at them; and

WHEREAS, In 1994, she co-founded the Black Triangle Women's Percussion Ensemble and later performed with another percussion group, Drawing Down the Moon; and

WHEREAS, As a member of Buffalo United Artists, she was nominated for an Artie Award in 1993 for her role in a one-woman drama, "Cookin' with Typhoid Mary"; she also received the David DeMarie Entertainer of the Year Award in 1988; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis became a Reiki master, practicing hands-on healing, specializing in animals; she and her wife did rescue work for Keeshond dogs; and

WHEREAS, She was the subject of a 2009 documentary film, "Swimming with Lesbians," and was inducted into The Advocate magazine's Hall of Fame in 2012; this same year, she served as Grand Marshal of Buffalo's annual Pride Parade; and

WHEREAS, Madeline Davis moved from Buffalo to Kenmore in 1990 to care for her ailing mother and had been an Amherst resident since 2006; she enjoyed gardening and quilting; and

WHEREAS, In addition to her wife, Madeline Davis is survived by her sister, Sheila E. Davis; she will be deeply missed and truly merits the tribute from this Legislative Body; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Madeline Davis 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

mourn the death of Madeline Davis, and to express its deepest condolences to her family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Madeline Davis.