

2021-J1795

Senate Resolution No. 1795

BY: Senator CLEARE

MOURNING the death of Sidney Poitier, legendary actor, trailblazer and civil rights advocate

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay just tribute to the memory of those prominent individuals whose creative talents contributed to the entertainment and cultural enrichment of the citizens of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Sidney Poitier, the Oscar-winning actor who brought a quiet dignity to his characters on screen and helped break down the color barrier in Hollywood, died on Thursday, January 6, 2022, at the age of 94; and

WHEREAS, Born on February 20, 1927, in Miami, Florida, Sidney Poitier spent much of his childhood in the Bahamas, before moving to New York City at just 16 years old; and

WHEREAS, Sidney Poitier began his illustrious acting career at a young age when he secured a spot at the American Negro Theatre in Harlem, the renowned and historic company that nurtured the talents of many African American greats, including Ruby Dee and Harry Belafonte; and

WHEREAS, In 1950, Sidney Poitier had his first feature in a major film entitled "No Way Out," playing a Black doctor persecuted by a

racist patient; and

WHEREAS, Sidney Poitier rose to prominence when the civil rights movement was beginning to make headway in the United States, and his roles often reflected the peaceful integrationist goals of the struggle; by refusing roles which played into stereotypes, he pushed the restrictive boundaries set by the entertainment industry and made strong advances into the American mainstream; and

WHEREAS, In 1955, Sidney Poitier experienced his career breakthrough in his role as a student in an inner-city school in the film "Blackboard Jungle"; his portrayal of determined, dignified heroes in other films like "To Sir, With Love," "In the Heat of the Night" and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" established him as Hollywood's first Black matinee idol and helped open the door for other Black actors; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, his other memorable roles include the musical "Porgy and Bess," the film adaptation of "A Raisin in the Sun," "A Patch of Blue," "Cry, the Beloved Country," and "The Defiant Ones"; and

WHEREAS, A true pioneer whose legacy will inspire countless generations to come, Sidney Poitier's Academy Award for the 1963 film "Lilies of the Field" made him the first Black performer to win in the best-actor category; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in the 1970s, Sidney Poitier directed numerous films, including "Uptown Saturday Night" and "Let's Do It Again"; in

1980, he directed the hit comedy "Stir Crazy," starring Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder; and

WHEREAS, After retiring from acting in 1997, Sidney Poitier proudly

served as the non-resident Bahamian ambassador to Japan until 2007; and

WHEREAS, In 2002, 38 years after receiving his best actor Oscar, Sidney Poitier was given an honorary Academy Award for his remarkable accomplishments as an artist and as a human being; in 2009, President Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honor; and

WHEREAS, Over the course of his renowned career in film and parallel career in advocating for the progression of civil rights, Sidney Poitier truly devoted his remarkable talents and energies to the uplift of all people, defying racial stereotypes, championing for justice and equality, and moving audiences the world over with his powerful performances; and

WHEREAS, Sidney Poitier is survived by his wife, Joanna Shimkus, and his six daughters; and

WHEREAS, A man of colossal talent, Sidney Poitier was a brilliant artist and an inspiration to millions around the world; his dedication to his career and community leaves an indelible legacy of inspiration which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to his family, friends and countless fans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Sidney Poitier, and to express its deepest condolences to his family; and be it further

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