

2023-J442

Senate Resolution No. 442

BY: Senator COONEY

MOURNING the death of The Reverend Franklin Florence, renowned religious leader, local civil rights icon, and devoted member of his community

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to bring full recognition and just tribute to those men and women of religious commitment who accept the responsibility of moral leadership and render the wisdom of human understanding; and

WHEREAS, It is with profound intent that this Legislative Body is moved to pay homage to a man of indomitable faith and dedication whose purposeful life and accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence, a true freedom fighter and trailblazer for civil rights and social justice in his beloved community of Rochester, New York, died on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, at the age of 89; and

WHEREAS, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Florence was born August 9, 1933, in the black Overtown neighborhood of Miami; his mother was a domestic worker and his father, a railroad worker and ice salesman, died when he was just three years old; his mother went on to remarry and the family read the Bible together every evening; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence spent five years preaching in Florida before taking a job in 1959, at the age of 25, as pastor at the Reynolds Street Church of Christ in Rochester; he was paid \$65 a week with lodging upstairs from the sanctuary for him, his wife Mary, and his children; and

WHEREAS, Upon his arrival to Rochester, Minister Franklin Florence graced his community and the national stage with a dynamic voice that championed the concerns of Black Americans and the universal causes of social justice; he first gained local prominence as an advocate during a series of police brutality cases involving the Rochester Police Department; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence was visiting his family in Miami in July of 1964 when the Rochester uprising took place, but quickly returned to the city and stood at the forefront of the newly urgent demand for racial justice; his role in this vital movement was later depicted in a 2006 documentary, "July '64"; and

WHEREAS, Authentic and unwavering in his principals, Minister Franklin Florence was never afraid to get into "good and necessary trouble" to expose racial and systemic injustice across a wide range of issues, including quality housing, criminal justice and corrections, fair labor practices, equitable education, child welfare and generational poverty; and

WHEREAS, Among his many accomplishments was his founding of the F.I.G.H.T. (Freedom, Independence, God, Honor, Today) organization in

1964; the organization advocated first for desegregation in the Rochester City School District, then for the improvement of mostly-black schools; and

WHEREAS, Under the able leadership of Minister Franklin Florence, F.I.G.H.T. also took on Xerox and the Eastman Kodak Company over discriminatory hiring practices, creating the foundation for a more diverse corporate workforce today; and

WHEREAS, Through F.I.G.H.T. Square and F.I.G.H.T. Village, Minister Franklin Florence provided housing to thousands; additionally, his creation of Eltrex Industries was instrumental in the creation of countless jobs in the Rochester community; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, he tirelessly advocated for greater black representation in community agencies, investigation into police brutality and the patronage of black-owned businesses; and

WHEREAS, A role model and mentor to many young Black leaders, Minister Franklin Florence could always be counted on to stand with people who were fighting for rights, whether it was supporting Black students at SUNY Brockport, the University of Rochester, and Colgate Divinity School, or protesting the Public Defender selection process in 2009; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence was a giant among giants in Rochester's proud legacy of social justice and civil rights; fittingly, his name and image are now embedded into the city landscape on a mural on the outer wall of East High School alongside Malcolm X and Connie Mitchell, and as the namesake of the Minister Franklin D. Florence Civil Rights Heritage Site at Baden Park; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence's life was dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of human dignity; this resolute gentleman's finest legacy of greater social justice for all was truly reflected in his devotion to serve and respect others, and in his steadfast love for

all humanity; and

WHEREAS, This extraordinary man selflessly fought the evils of racism during the most terrible days of apartheid; he inspired an entire nation with his words and his courage, truly reviving the people's hope during the darkest of times; and

WHEREAS, An apostle of peace, Minister Franklin Florence fought unrelentingly for the civil rights of all people, and taught us that through non-violence, courage displaces fear, love transforms hate, acceptance dissipates prejudice and mutual regard cancels enmity; and

WHEREAS, Minister Franklin Florence's monumental legacy will continue to shine forth as a beacon of hope for all those who aspire to create a just and peaceful world; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of The Reverend Franklin Florence, 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 The Reverend Franklin Florence.