

2023-J505

Senate Resolution No. 505

BY: Senator PARKER

MOURNING the death of John-Edward Akiwande Wright,
distinguished citizen and devoted member of his
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 endeavors
served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and the great
State of New York; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright of Brooklyn, New York, died on
January 17, 2023, at the age of 57; and

WHEREAS, Born on August 2, 1965, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West
Africa, John-Edward Akiwande Wright was raised by his parents, Cyrus
Rogers-Wright and Claudia (May) Harding; and

WHEREAS, Upon immigrating to the United States, John-Edward Akiwande
Wright attended high school at LaSalle Academy in New York City; he
later graduated with his Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Niagara
University in Lewiston, New York, before receiving his Master of Public
Administration degree from the New School in New York City; and

WHEREAS, In his youth, John-Edward Akiwande Wright spent many
summers in Upstate New York as a participant in the Fresh Air Fund;
highlighting his leadership and commitment to his community and

passions, John-Edward was also an avid long-distance runner and captained his high school and collegiate cross-country teams; and

WHEREAS, A tireless advocate for his fellow New Yorkers as a member of the Brooklyn community, John-Edward Akiwande Wright served as Assistant Executive Director for the Center for Children and Families/Safespace, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, While serving as Assistant Executive Director, John-Edward Akiwande Wright established one of the first drop-in centers in Times Square for runaway and homeless youth; this center became a critical resource in the early 1990s for LGBTQ+ and HIV-positive youth, who too often had nowhere to feel safe; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright was also the Assistant Executive Director of New York City's oldest African-American-run child welfare agency, the Harlem Dowling-Westside Center; and

WHEREAS, In 2010, John-Edward Akiwande Wright founded The Wright Group NY, one of the first Black-owned government relations firms in New York City and one of the only firms committed to representing non-profit organizations and the social services sector; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright took enormous pride in the numerous legislative advancements he and The Wright Group NY were instrumental in achieving, like New York's Raise the Age legislation; and

WHEREAS, The creation of The Wright Group NY was fundamentally unique and grounded in John-Edward Akiwande Wright's vision to support New York communities and those who are too often rendered voiceless; the firm brought together a community of those connected by their efforts

and commitment to advance justice and equality; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright believed that meaningful transformative change could only be achieved when the City's most marginalized citizens gain access to influence and become decision-makers in every aspect of government; he empowered those advocating for equitable solutions to advance systemic change by supporting clients and coalitions and guiding leaders and youth alike; John-Edward also served as a board member for numerous non-profits, including Harlem United and the Brooklyn Community Foundation; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright is survived by his three sons, Caleb Gardner Wright, Elijah Gardner Wright, and Jaylin Speight, whom he raised in Brooklyn with his life partner, Regina Woods; his mother, Claudia; the mother to Caleb and Elijah, Tracie M. Gardner; and several aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews; John-Edward was preceded in death by his father, Cyrus; and

WHEREAS, It was John-Edward Akiwande Wright's identity and role as a father that he cherished most; creating a world of access, equity, beauty, and love for his boys gave him his deepest sense of purpose and was his constant north star; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright's passion and joy for life was infectious to all those around him, he was a creative at heart who loved and supported the arts, music, and theater; he proudly celebrated his cultural and historical roots and was an avid lover and collector of African art; and

WHEREAS, A truly caring and compassionate individual, John-Edward Akiwande Wright's love for animals and the outdoors led to his ventures to train dogs and raise rare and exotic birds; he also enjoyed fly

fishing, sailing, and kayaking; and

WHEREAS, John-Edward Akiwande Wright moved through the world with a commanding presence and power, but it was a power not through dominance, but through service and understanding; he was a colorful, spirited, and complex person who was widely respected for not just what he did, but for who he was and how he did it; and

WHEREAS, With an inquisitiveness, humility, and thirst for knowledge, John-Edward Akiwande Wright was always learning; his openness about his journey and pursuit of personal betterment and healing illustrated the integrity with which he lived his life; he was known for his deep and lasting relationships, brilliant strategic mind, infectious laugh, and his generous and compassionate spirit; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, John-Edward Akiwande Wright leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of John-Edward Akiwande Wright, 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 John-Edward Akiwande Wright.