



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 15-4722, **Version:** 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

COMMEMORATING THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE HONORABLE DONA GERSON

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson represented the best qualities of citizenship and humanity through her life-long work as an elected official and community leader. She served as an Evanston Alderman, Library Trustee and was active in politics her entire life. When she died on July 10, 2015 she left behind a family, countless friends and a community profoundly enriched for having known her; and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson was born and raised in Akron, Ohio. She met her husband of over 61 years, Stan Gerson during her first year of law school at Case Western Reserve. Both Dona and Stan took career detours and left Akron for Chicago, and finally settled Evanston. She left the law for teaching and the two settled in South Evanston where they raised their two children Lisa and Michael and became politically involved in the movements promoting fair housing and school desegregation in addition to many other local issues; and ;

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson had a lifelong interest in politics that began very early; she was a self-described “political junkie” who enjoyed discussing politics. When the Gersons were in their 40s, they spent a year in London during her husband’s sabbatical. While there, Dona was exposed to a radio show that interested her. When she returned, she pitched the idea of doing a similar program to WBEZ, Chicago’s Public radio station. Dona became a radio host of a program that featured interesting content from current magazine articles; and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson was an admired and longtime member of the League of Women Voters of Evanston, generously supporting the organization for decades and tirelessly mentoring the organization’s newest leaders; her generosity with her time was legendary. As a valued member of the League she worked tirelessly, advocating for justice and equality for all. She was active on the North Shore Summer Project, an open housing initiative and was a passionate supporter of Evanston’s school integration initiative. She was also an extremely talented writer whose talents were put to good use when she became the editor of the League’s newsletter, *The Intercom*. She honed her leadership skills during her early League years and it was with their strong support and encouragement that she ran and won a seat in Evanston’s City Council; and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson’s love of politics and leadership abilities were put to work for her community when she was elected by the voters of Evanston’s Ninth Ward to be their Alderman. She diligently represented the ward from 1979 to 1983. She also served on Evanston’s Zoning Board of Appeals. She forged strong bonds with her fellow elected officials that outlasted their terms of office and spanned decades. They gathered once a month meeting socially to talk about everything from Evanston politics to their grandchildren; and;

WHEREAS, Dona was a lifelong learner who had a passion for poetry and loved, in particular Shakespeare’s sonnets. She attended classes at Northwestern University’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and later became a coordinator. Her appreciation for the written word and devotion to her community was acknowledged and she was appointed to be an Evanston Library Trustee. There was no better advocate for the Evanston Public Library. She served two terms, and will long be remembered for her work supporting the expansion of evening hours and the renovation of the aging Chicago Avenue facility. She was also the voice of wisdom during the Youth Service Renovation Project of 2009 and for successfully and diplomatically guiding the process when the library transitioned to a separate tax-levying district; and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson was a great champion of the principles of participatory democracy and was innovative in her work to further those standards. She coupled her in-depth understanding of government and her talent as a writer to author an instructional piece on how to be an effective advocate before a board or commission which was published in Illinois Issues Magazine; and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson entered Cook County politics in the late 70's, when she became Administrative Assistant to Commissioner Joanne Alter at the Chicago Metropolitan Water Reclamation District. Later she became a management analyst at the Chicago Metropolitan Sanitary District and retired in 1993;and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson was a cherished member of her synagogue, Beth Emet. The congregation has a tradition of anonymously delivering food to ill or housebound members of the synagogue. Despite the anonymous nature of the program, it was widely known that in many cases, the items had either been prepared by Dona or delivered by her, or both. Few could match her culinary skills or thoughtfulness. She was also a talented seamstress who learned to sew from a treasured aunt and frequently sewed her children's clothing; and

WHEREAS, the community has lost a great friend in Dona Gerson and she will be sorely missed by her two children Lisa Gerson and Michael Gerson but her loss will be felt most acutely by her husband of 61 years, Stan Gerson and her dear friends of over fifty years, a group of intrepid women known as the "Quintessentials;" and

WHEREAS, Dona Gerson possessed the unique combination of passionate political activism and diplomacy. She regularly achieved her goals without rancor and, as a result was genuinely admired and respected by her peers. She formed and nurtured strong relationships with fellow elected officials and friends that lasted over fifty years; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County commemorates the extraordinary life of Dona Gerson and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions she has made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this Resolution be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that an official copy of the same be tendered to the family of Dona Gerson.