



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

---

**File #: 22-2785, Version: 1**

---

### **PROPOSED RESOLUTION**

#### **HONORING THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF JIM REILLY**

**WHEREAS**, Jim Reilly, a downstate Illinois lawmaker who became chief of staff to two governors and headed agencies that oversaw mass transit in the Chicago area, state construction projects, and the operations of McCormick Place and Navy Pier, has died at 77; and

**WHEREAS**, Reilly grew up in Springfield where he attended Springfield High School. His father James was an attorney and his mother Alta a secretary for the American Red Cross. After graduating from Illinois College in Jacksonville, he received his Juris Doctor from the University of Chicago Law School in 1971. He worked for the city of Jacksonville, Illinois, before becoming a state representative in 1977; and

**WHEREAS**, Reilly entered the Illinois House in the same class as former Governor Jim Edgar. Those years of service propelled Edgar to higher office and brought Reilly, a self-described Rockefeller Republican, to the attention of then Governor Jim Thompson. Thompson, recognizing Reilly's talent, made him his counsel and subsequently chief of staff; and

**WHEREAS**, when Thompson left office, Reilly took over as head of the agency in charge of the project to rebuild Navy Pier, the Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority (McPier), a signature project of the Thompson administration. During much of the 1990s, he served as chief executive officer of McPier. He helped oversee renovations and expansion including development at the McCormick Place South Building and Hyatt Regency McCormick Place. During his tenure, the pier became the most popular tourist attraction in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, when Jim Edgar became governor, he brought Reilly back for a second stint as gubernatorial chief of staff. During Edgar's recovery from emergency surgery, Reilly became "a familiar and respected stand-in for the governor," the Tribune reported in 1994. The Tribune described Reilly as "an administrator with a well-known contempt for inertia; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1999, Reilly went from running the convention hall to helping fill it as chair of the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau where he served for five years. He returned to the McPier as trustee in 2010, when state legislation named him to lead a revamp of operations including moving the convention center and Navy Pier to private management. During that time, he backed controversial labor rule changes that he later said allowed the city to retain and bring new trade shows to the city; and

**WHEREAS**, he became chairman of the RTA board in 2005 as the region's transportation agencies sought to avoid financial doomsday. There, he worked to calm feuds between the RTA's operating units-the Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, and Pace-over who would get limited subsidies and capital funds. He helped avoid the worst-case scenario, and worked to plug a huge CTA pension shortfall; and

**WHEREAS**, throughout his years of service, Reilly was the go-between, a savvy and trusted insider who could segue from Republican governors to Democratic mayors and, with a minimum of partisan fuss, work out deals to expand McCormick Place, restructure the Regional Transportation Authority and revitalize Chicago's tourism agency; and

**WHEREAS**, Reilly served one other GOP governor: Bruce Rauner, chairing the Illinois Capital Development Board, the state's construction arm. He remained until his death on the boards of Choose Chicago (the successor of the tourism

bureau), Navy Pier, Mercy Hospital, and the Illinois Institute of Technology; and

**WHEREAS**, Reilly had a deep appreciation for music and a commitment to the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and rooted for the Bears, Bulls and St. Louis Cardinals. He traveled extensively. He also had a passion for real and model trains, and enjoyed showing his train network to his nieces and nephews during holiday gatherings; and

**WHEREAS**, in his oral history, Reilly said one of the biggest changes he'd seen in government was a shift over time to a reflexive anti-tax stance among politicians and the public. "In the '70s and even into the early '80s, tax increases were not evil," he said. "Politically, nobody ever campaigned on, 'Got to have a tax increase.' But I think generally people maybe had more faith in government and had more of a sense that taxes are sort of a necessary evil, something you pay for the price of having the kind of things you want;" and

**WHEREAS**, Reilly is survived by his beloved wife, Veronica Lynch, and extended family. "Jim lived life large, was kind and led a life filled with incredible accomplishments. He dedicated his life to public service. He gave his time, attention, and philanthropic support to multiple charitable and artistic endeavors. He did not take for granted the goodwill and friendship of others," his wife said in a written statement. "I don't believe he fully realized the impact he had on Illinois, most visibly Chicago. He departed with a million more plans in mind."

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County, honors the life and contributions of Jim Reilly and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he 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 same be tendered to the family of Jim Reilly.