



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

IN MEMORY OF THE HONORABLE JUSTICE THOMAS FITZGERALD, FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT

WHEREAS, Thomas Fitzgerald, former Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, a man who spent his life deeply devoted to faith, family and public service died at the age of 74, leaving behind family, friends and a community profoundly enriched for having known him; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Fitzgerald will long be remembered for his exceptional leadership and wisdom during crisis. His equanimity and strength helped guide the judiciary through some of its darkest days and restored integrity to a system that had been devastated by a massive FBI investigation into judicial corruption that resulted in fifteen judges being convicted. Under his leadership the traffic court was entirely restructured and improved. Through his personal integrity and the redesign he was able to restore the reputation of the division as well as the entire Circuit Court; and

WHEREAS, As chief Justice, Thomas Fitzgerald presided over the only impeachment trial for a governor in Illinois state history and did so in a dignified and conscientious manner, once again stepping in to confront crisis and assist in the restoration of public confidence after one of Illinois' worst scandals; and

WHEREAS Fitzgerald was a proud Chicago South-sider. His father was a Cook County Circuit Court judge. Fitzgerald graduated from Leo Catholic High School and attended Loyola University in Chicago before enlisting in the Navy. After his discharge from the service, he enrolled in John Marshall Law School, where he founded the school's law review and later served as its editor; and

WHEREAS, after serving as a top prosecutor for the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, he was elected to the Circuit Court in 1976, becoming the youngest elected circuit judge in Cook County; and

WHEREAS, Judge Fitzgerald later was assigned to the Criminal Division as presiding judge in the late 80's where he put to work his exceptional skills as both a visionary and a pragmatist. He initiated the evening narcotics court, a pioneering courtroom designed to address the unique problems of the addicted that assisted them in obtaining treatment; the program had the added benefit of substantially reducing recidivism. Participants in narcotics court benefited from the focus on addiction and away from incarceration which helped avoid the disruption incarceration has on work and family obligations and at the same time reduced jail overcrowding; and

WHEREAS, another initiative credited to Judge Fitzgerald was the introduction of the practice of informing prosecutors that cases would be dismissed for want of prosecution if no attorney or police witness was present; and

WHEREAS, Judge Fitzgerald was a long-time and outspoken advocate for death penalty reform. He was appointed chairman of the newly formed Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases in April 1999 before his election to the state Supreme Court in 2000; and

WHEREAS in addition to being a much admired judge, Justice Fitzgerald was a much treasured professor of law and leading member of the bar. He taught at The John Marshall Law School and Chicago-Kent College of Law. He tirelessly served as president of the Illinois Judges Association, was a member of the Governor's Task Force on Crime and Corrections. He chaired several committees of the Illinois Judicial Conference and a member of the Chicago Bar

Association's Board of Managers; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Fitzgerald enjoyed a lengthy and stellar legal career. He had the unique ability to work without rancor and as a result was genuinely admired and respected by those on both sides of the courtroom and the political aisle. In his race for the Illinois Supreme Court he counted as supporters and friends both defense attorneys and prosecutors, alike. He had loyal supporters of all political perspectives as well as civic organizations and bar associations. All shared one view, that Thomas Fitzgerald was the best candidate for the job; Former Governor Jim Thompson served as the chairman of Fitzgerald's Illinois Supreme Court campaign and described him as "a breed apart"; and

WHEREAS, Justice Fitzgerald brought with him to the Illinois Supreme Court his exceptional ability to unite people. He was unanimously elected by his colleagues to be Chief Justice; and

WHEREAS, current Chief Illinois Supreme Court Justice Rita B. Garman was a colleague and friend to Thomas Fitzgerald for nearly 30 years: "Over the many years, he never changed. He was a warm and caring person, and even when on the bench, his demeanor revealed his genuine concern about the people who appeared before him;" and

WHEREAS, Justice Thomas Fitzgerald will be sorely missed by his wife of 48 years, Gayle; his son, Thomas A.; four daughters, Maura O'Daniel, Kathryn Chang, Jean Fendick and Ann Butler; and eight grandchildren.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County who he served dutifully, commemorates the life of the Honorable Justice Thomas Fitzgerald, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he 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 the Honorable Justice Thomas Fitzgerald.