



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Details

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COMMEMORATING THE EXCEPTIONAL LIFE, COURAGEOUS SPIRIT AND GENEROSITY OF WALTER REED

WHEREAS, Walter Reed died at the age of 91 having lived a remarkable life that was touched by the deepest sadness and the greatest joy. He was a successful businessman, an inspiring author and speaker, and a tireless advocate for those who struggled with special needs. While he never forgot the anti-Semitism he faced in Germany that killed his family, or the prejudice that led him to change his name and hide his past for 50 years he had a strong desire to never be a prisoner of the past; and

WHEREAS, Walter Reed was born Werner Rindsberg in Germany in 1924 and spent his early childhood in Bavaria. In June 1939, his family put him on a train for Brussels as part of a children's refugee rescue program. Eventually he made his way to La Hille, France, where he and 100 other Jewish children were hidden from the Germans, barely surviving at an abandoned French estate called Chateau de La Hille. He was able to leave France in 1941 for New York, where his mother had relatives, however, his parents and siblings perished during the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, when Walter Reed arrived in New York he became an apprentice to a tool-and-die maker and enrolled in high school. In 1943, when he was 19, he was drafted into the army. The army offered U.S. citizenship and Walter changed his name as part of that process. He shed his German name of Werner Rindsberg along with his German accent. He worked at Allied headquarters in Paris as a German translator who assisted with prisoner interrogation. One of his assignments was the denazification of the university at Marburg. Despite having only a high school education, he played a major role in deciding which of the eminent faculty could teach. After the German surrender he served in the Counter Intelligence Corps which had the task of denazifying the Germans; and

WHEREAS, after the war, Walter Reed attended the University of Missouri where he received a degree in journalism and worked successfully for many years in the public relations field. He settled in Chicago and worked for decades as the public relations director of the National Automatic Merchandising Association, the national organization of vending-machine businesses. Walter and his wife Jeanne moved to Wilmette where they raised three sons Brian, Andrew and McRae; and WHEREAS, following the birth of their first son, Brian, who was born with cerebral palsy, Walter Reed became a special needs advocate. He spoke publicly about his son's condition and about how people treat the disabled, and in 1977 he became one of 16 Illinois delegates to the White House Conference on Persons With Disabilities. In the mid-80s he began a nine-year term on the board of directors of the Anixter Center, a service agency helping people with disabilities in the Chicago region, and he cofounded and served as the first president of the Parents Alliance of the Northern Suburban Special Education District; working closely with the local school district. In recognition for his tireless work the District 39 Educational Foundation presented him with the 2010 Distinguished Citizen Award; and WHEREAS, Walter Reed retired in 1989 and started a consulting business. After he read a Chicago Tribune article about Steven Spielberg's foundation collecting oral histories from Holocaust survivors he shared his story with Spielberg's Shoah project. Afterwards, Walter Reed traveled with his family back to France. He learned that the owner of the barn where he had lived for ten months was still alive and that 90 out of the 100 now-grown Children of La Hille had been holding regular reunions. He organized a reunion in Wilmette in 1998 and later wrote a well-reviewed 2015 book, "The Children of

La Hille: Eluding Nazi Capture During World War II,” describing how he and the other Jewish boys and girls from 4 to 18 years old survived part of the war in France; and

WHEREAS for many years Walter Reed never revealed the truth about his past to his friends or coworkers. But the struggles of his formative years quietly inspired the activism of his later years. He spent his life opposing discrimination. “The activism on behalf of the disabled grows out of the sense that if good citizens don't take part in the life of their country, bad things will flourish. To me, it's not just the Nazis. It's Cambodia. It's Ethiopia. It's burning books or forbidding books to be read, because I remember when the Nazis burned books and kicked out artists they didn't like.”: and

WHEREAS, Walter Reed was a treasured member of the Wilmette Harbor Rotary Club. He was the weekly newsletter editor for many years. He was involved with the Vocational Service Committee and was instrumental in initiating involvement with local adults with serious mental/physical challenges. He and his wife, Jeanne, were also active in the Club's Youth Exchange program as host parents. One of the organization's traditions was to have members to share their stories. He had been active with the organization working alongside people for years who thought they knew him but they were surprised to hear of his fleeing the Nazis; and

WHEREAS, Walter Reed spent nearly his entire life in service to others in one way or another. He served on the Boards of the Chicago Metropolitan Planning Council and the Anixter Center. He was a nineteen-year Rotarian and was active with the Illinois Holocaust Museum. In 2015 he was appointed to the village of Wilmette's Housing Our Own Wilmette board of directors; and

WHEREAS, Walter Reed was a tireless advocate up until his last moment despite having had a serious heart attack in the 1980's. He regularly gave speeches about his life; he called it "The Triumph of the Human Spirit." He chose that title because "even in the darkest times and the most horrible situations, humans can rise and do rise above the circumstances; and

WHEREAS, 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 Walter Reed, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable and innumerable 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 Walter Reed...end

Sponsors: LARRY SUFFREDIN, LUIS ARROYO JR, RICHARD R. BOYKIN, JERRY BUTLER, JOHN P. DALEY, JOHN A. FRITCHEY, BRIDGET GAINER, JESÚS G. GARCÍA, GREGG GOSLIN, STANLEY MOORE, SEAN M. MORRISON, JOAN PATRICIA MURPHY, TONI PRECKWINKLE (President), TIMOTHY O. SCHNEIDER, PETER N. SILVESTRI, DEBORAH SIMS, ROBERT STEELE, JEFFREY R. TOBOLSKI

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Attachments:

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