



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

COMMEMORATING THE LIFE, MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND MEMORY OF VOYLE “GENE” BELL

WHEREAS, Voyle “Gene” Bell, pioneering community leader, father figure to countless students and championship winning basketball star passed away on Thursday, July 9. He has left behind a devoted family, countless athletes, friends and a community enriched for having known him; and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell recognized the deep void left when the City of Evanston cut back its middle-school athletic program in 1968. As a result he helped found the Fellowship of African American Men “FAAM”. Not only did FAAM fill the void, it profoundly changed the community and made it a better place. Decades later it remains a much admired and thriving community program that provides good role models for kids, and instills in its athletes the principles of teamwork, discipline and respect for the coaches and officials. Gene Bell was the organization’s greatest champion and became known as “Commissioner for Life;” and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell moved to Evanston as a young child. He attended Evanston Township High School where he quickly became an athletic star and local legend on the school’s basketball and baseball teams. After graduating he was recruited to attend Upper Iowa University on basketball and baseball scholarships; and

WHEREAS, his education was interrupted by the call of family obligation. Gene Bell returned to Evanston to assist the woman who had raised him, his beloved grandmother Leora Bell, after the passing of her second husband. He credits much of his success to her. “My grandmother made sure I did the right thing. She was the matriarch of our whole family. She meant everything to me;” and,

WHEREAS, Gene Bell accepted employment with Row, Peterson Publishing, which later became Harper & Row. When the business moved to Kansas 16 years later, he started his career at Evanston Township High School, first on the custodial staff and later in security, where he became a popular fixture in the school and friend to all. He retired in 1995; and,

WHEREAS, throughout his life, Gene Bell worked tirelessly to ensure the success of FAAM. Under his watch it expanded to reach thousands of kids. Today, FAAM has fourteen boys’ teams, six girls’ teams and three cheerleading squads, comprising approximately 350 youngsters and 70 volunteer coaches/administrators; and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell’s pioneering efforts with FAAM had a far reaching impact on thousands of lives. Nirba White, a FAAM player who played professional basketball overseas, said “Words can’t describe what his leadership and mentoring have meant to the African American community;” and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell’s spirit remains alive in FAAM’s mission to empower youth through athletics and education. A former student-athlete himself, he well understood the importance of excellence on and off the court. Today, FAAM tracks school performance, requires players to maintain a minimum grade point average, and provides a study program with teachers and tutors on hand after school and on Saturdays to help with homework; and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell’s leadership was not limited to athletics. He played a major role in organizing a union for the

Security Department at Evanston Township High School. He was a member of the Candidate Nominating Committee for the school boards of District 65 and District 202 and he served as Co-Chair for the 'Save Our Children' community project. His love for baseball led him to become a Little League Umpire for the recreation department of Evanston from 1979 to 1986; and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell's exceptional abilities singled him out for distinction and the community presented him with numerous honors. In addition to others, he received the William E. Harper Award from the McGraw YMCA and the Distinguished Community Service Award from the NAACP. He was also awarded the "Those Who Excel" honor from the Illinois State Board of Education, the Community Service Award from the Illinois Park and Recreation Association, and the SGMA Heroes "Man of the Year," and

WHEREAS, Gene Bell is survived by his wife, Constance "Connie" Bell, three daughters Renee Johnson, Gina Bradley and Morma Russell, one son David, one grandson Aaron, three granddaughters Karisa, Shaniece and Tatana, one great grandson and two sisters. Along with many other relatives and friends the community mourns the loss of Gene Bell; and.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Commissioners of Cook County that the Board on behalf of the nearly the 5.2 million residents of Cook County takes great pleasure in commemorating the life of Gene Bell, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he has made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and does hereby offer its deepest condolences and most heartfelt sympathy to the coworkers, family, and many friends of Gene Bell and joins them in sorrow at the sudden loss of this remarkable and accomplished civil servant and community leader; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this text be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and a suitable copy of same be tendered to the family of Gene Bell, that his memory may be so honored.