



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 19-4751, **Version:** 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE LIFE and CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARGARET BLACKSHERE

WHEREAS, Margaret Blackshere was a powerful and historic force in Illinois labor and politics, from her time as the first woman to head the state AFL-CIO to her tenure as a member of the Democratic National Committee, and as a delegate to the party's presidential nominating conventions.

WHEREAS, Margaret was raised in North Venice, Illinois by her mother, Frances, and her Aunt Margie. She received her master's degree in education at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and became a kindergarten teacher in nearby Madison. While a student at SIUE, she served as a student trustee. After completing her studies, she was appointed by the governor to continue in the role of trustee. In Madison, she launched the organizing drive that led to the school's teachers becoming affiliated with the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT); and

WHEREAS, Margaret was known as being tough but charming. She went from being a kindergarten teacher to taking on union and political posts while working to modernize the labor movement. She made history as the first woman to lead the Illinois AFL-CIO and helped lead Democrats to victory across the state; and

WHEREAS, Margaret rose through the ranks of the statewide IFT and in 1993 was elected secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO. Seven years later, following a rare, bitterly contested battle for control, she was elected president of the umbrella organization for labor unions in Illinois. It was a post she held until retiring from the position in 2007. Her union presidency came during a time of change for organized labor as power shifted from private-sector unions to organizations representing public-sector workers; and

WHEREAS, Margaret was known for trying to make union leadership more inclusive along racial and gender lines to be more representative of the membership. She brought a higher level of union activity to the Democratic Party, including leading coordinated campaigns among candidates, along with serving on the DNC and as a convention delegate. She threw her full support and political muscle behind countless Democrats, helping Dan Hynes win election as state comptroller and Barack Obama as president of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Margaret had many accomplishments during her tenure, including winning increases in the state minimum wage and helping land pro-labor individuals on state boards and commissions; and

WHEREAS, Margaret's greatest contribution to Illinois' labor movement may have been her capacity to unify diverse groups and build coalitions, both within the Labor movement, and between Labor, small business, and community and faith-based groups. She forged critical alliances with the Illinois Manufacturers Association to create and save manufacturing jobs in our state and with The Transportation for Illinois Coalition, a group of labor and business groups working to secure state and federal funds for Illinois' infrastructure. Within the Labor movement, Margaret worked tirelessly to keep Illinois affiliates united and working together in political and legislative efforts, even when several international unions left the AFL-CIO; and

WHEREAS, Senator Dick Durban described Margaret as having, "the caring heart of a downstate teacher and the fierce spirit of an advocate fighting for justice in classrooms and workplaces across Illinois"; and

WHEREAS, Dan Montgomery, the president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the union in which Margaret began

her labor advocacy, described her as “A very dynamic person (with) a great sense of humor. She would have to have had a great sense of humor to do the work she did. But she was also tough. She had to be tough to get to the position she got to - trying to mediate the trades and industrial unions, and public sector unions; taking on tough issues in Illinois politics, finances, and human rights; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Flynn Currie, a close friend and associate, described Margaret as “down to earth, ... a real person.” She enjoyed baseball and other hobbies. At the same time, as the first woman president of the ALF-CIO, she created a seat at the table for female workers and always fought for their best interests. Her passing is the end of a very important era in Illinois labor history; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her labor and political work, Margaret served on boards, councils, and coalitions that included the United Way of Illinois, American Red Cross in Illinois, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, the Illinois Women’s Institute for Leadership and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Advisory Council; and

WHEREAS, Margaret is survived by two sons, Michael (Catherine) and Thomas (Zoe); her sister, Patricia (the late Leroy) Smith; and four grandchildren, Michael, Alex, Quinn, and Raquel Blackshere;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, 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 life of **MAGARET BLACKSHERE**, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the years of service she gave 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 **MAGARET BLACKSHERE**.