



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 13-1927, **Version:** 1

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### **PROPOSED RESOLUTION**

#### **IN MEMORY OF JEAN ROLFING CLELAND**

**WHEREAS,** Jean Rolfing Cleland, a woman whose life was devoted to social justice, family, and faith, died September 19 in her Wilmette home; and

**WHEREAS,** For nearly five decades, the citizens of Cook County were the beneficiary of the tireless efforts of Jean Cleland. She was an indefatigable advocate for affordable housing and social justice; and

**WHEREAS,** Jean Cleland's remarkable contributions to the County of Cook resulted in her being honored with the 2005 Unsung Heroine Award for Illinois' 13th District from the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues; and

**WHEREAS,** Mrs. Cleland graduated from Northwestern University in 1944 with a bachelor's degree in English, and a year later was married, settling in Wilmette in 1950 with her husband, Robert; and

**WHEREAS,** A passionate crusader for fair and affordable housing, Jean Cleland was a founder in the 1950s and '60s of the Wilmette Human Relations Committee and the North Shore Summer Project, an organization that worked to end housing discrimination; and

**WHEREAS,** Jean Rolfing Cleland, whose social activism ranged from fighting for the rights of migrant workers to protesting against the Vietnam War, made open housing the focus of her volunteer efforts; and

**WHEREAS,** Mrs. Cleland organized the Wilmette Human Relations Committee, through which she held vigils of protest against the North Shore Real Estate Board and individual real estate agents who were known to follow discriminatory practices; and

**WHEREAS,** As a member of Wilmette's First Congregational Church for 54 years she challenged the congregation to oppose the Vietnam War and to support civil rights and nuclear disarmament; and

**WHEREAS,** A founding board member of the North Shore Interfaith Housing Council now called Open Communities, Cleland was on its board for over 30 years. She was also a board member of the Housing Opportunity Development Corporation in Wilmette for more than a decade and led efforts to overcome opposition to the creation of three low-income senior buildings in the village of Wilmette; and

**WHEREAS,** Mrs. Cleland also founded the North Shore chapter of SANE/Freeze, a peace action organization, and was also a founding member of the North Shore Peace Initiative. In the 1970s, she became involved in the United Farm Workers boycott of table grapes, and with a group of fellow church members, joined workers in the fields in California and later marched with Cesar Chavez; and

**WHEREAS,** While a young mother of six, Cleland along with other mothers started the North Shore Summer Project in the 1960s to encourage diversity and fight housing discrimination in the Chicago suburbs. That led to what her family describes as the "highlight of her life" in 1965 when Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the group's request to more than 8,000 people on Winnetka's village green; and

**WHEREAS**, Jean Cleland's commitment did not wane. At the time of her death at 89, Cleland was the coordinator and community education director for the North Shore Senior Center's Senior Health Insurance Program. She had been on the Northfield-based senior center's staff for 35 years, helping thousands of individuals navigate Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Supplement Insurance, the Medicare Drug Program and other benefit programs; and

**WHEREAS**, Jean Cleland was beloved not just in her community she was also the doting mother of six, sons David, Stuart, Carter, Phillip and Roger, and a daughter Trena Cleland; she was also a devoted sister to Joanne Gehlert; and

**WHEREAS**, Jean Cleland was adored and will be missed by her three grandchildren: Kelsey Cleland daughter of David & Candace Cleland, Desmond Cleland son of Roger Cleland & Peggy Ryan and Natalie Cleland daughter of Roger Cleland & Peggy Ryan; 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 Jean Rolfing Cleland, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for all of her work on behalf of the County and does hereby offer its deepest condolences and most heartfelt sympathy to the coworkers, family, and many friends of Jean Rolfing Cleland and joins them in sorrow at the 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 Jean Rolfing Cleland, that her memory may be so honored.