



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF FRITZIE FRITZSHALL

WHEREAS, Holocaust survivor, visionary, and long-time President of the Illinois Holocaust Museum Board, Fritzie Fritzshall, died on June 19, 2021; and

WHEREAS, Fritzie was born in Czechoslovakia prior to World War II. When the Nazis occupied her hometown of Klucharky, they deported Fritzie, her mother, and two brothers to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. At the time, Fritzie was a young teenager. “There is no way to describe what it was like to be in the rail car hungry, cold, without food, without water, watching pregnant women begging for water, watching different people dying in front of you from lack of food, air, and water,” Fritzie said. “My own grandfather died in this car going to Auschwitz.” Her mother, two younger brothers, and other family members were murdered. To survive, she pretended to be older than she was. Fritzie endured a torturous year in Auschwitz and a related Nazi labor camp, where she worked doing slave labor in a factory. In 1945, she was liberated by the Soviet Army after escaping into a nearby forest during a death march; and

WHEREAS, in 1946, Fritzie came to Skokie, Illinois, and reunited with her father, who worked for Vienna Beef. He had come to America before the Holocaust to provide his family with money from abroad. Fritzie married a U.S. veteran of World War II who had been a prisoner of war in the Pacific, and made a life for herself in Chicagoland as a hairdresser, becoming an avid Cubs fan in the process; and

WHEREAS, Fritzie’s call to activism began in the late 1970s when neo-Nazis threatened to march through the streets of Skokie. The terror and outrage of seeing swastikas in their community galvanized a group of survivors to establish the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois in 1981 to fight bigotry with education. The Foundation was a small but passionate operation housed in a modest storefront on Skokie’s Main Street. In 1990, Fritzie, with other survivors, convinced Governor James Thompson to sign the first Holocaust Education Mandate into law, making Illinois the first state in the country to require the teaching of the Holocaust in all public elementary and high schools. “I want to encourage teacher training and student learning about man’s continued inhumanity to man,” Fritzie said. In 2009, Chicagoland survivors’ long-held vision of opening a world-class educational institution became a reality with the opening of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center on Woods Drive in Skokie. It is the third-largest Holocaust museum in the world, and, since 2010, Fritzie served as its President; and

WHEREAS, under Fritzie’s leadership, the Museum grew to inspire more than 285,000 visitors annually, teaching them to stand up for what is right - transforming powerful lessons of history into positive actions today. The Museum has also received national acclaim, including recognition as a 2017 recipient of the National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Service, the nation’s highest award to a museum. “Fritzie was the heart and soul of our Museum,” said Susan Abrams, CEO of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. “She played an important role in the Museum transforming from regional player to global leader, sharing her story of survival and its lessons through cutting edge technology including interactive holograms and virtual reality film. I regularly watched in awe as Fritzie mesmerized audiences with her story and its lessons. All who were touched by her will never forget. She was an inspiration to me and to so many others.” Fritzie, in a 2019 interview: “I want the world to remember and to know to never, ever, ever, ever forget about the Holocaust. We say ‘never again,’ but we don’t often mean ‘never again.’ ‘Never again’ must be ‘never again.’ It must stop;” and

WHEREAS, during Fritzie’s presidency, Illinois Holocaust Museum envisioned and developed interactive 3D holograms

of survivors to preserve survivor stories in the most impactful way for generations to come. Studies show that hearing survivor testimony has a profound impact on how an individual relates to the history of the Holocaust. Making its world debut in 2017, the *Abe & Ida Cooper Survivor Stories Experience* was named one of the 12 must-see exhibitions globally by *Smithsonian Magazine* and featured on *60 Minutes*. The theater experience allows Museum visitors to engage with holograms of survivors who lived through the Holocaust. It utilizes *Dimensions in Testimony*, developed by USC Shoah Foundation in association with Illinois Holocaust Museum, and enables people to ask questions that prompt real-time responses from pre-recorded video interviews with Holocaust survivors. Fritzie is one of the holographic recordings; and

WHEREAS, later in her life, Fritzie became concerned that the world would not remember the horrors of Auschwitz. In 2021, the Museum will premier *A Promise Kept*, a virtual reality experience where visitors can stand with Fritzie as she returns to Auschwitz and tells the story of the promise she made to 599 women who, with each crumb of bread, kept her alive during the Holocaust. Fritzie endured five grueling days of answering thousands of probing questions about her experience before, during, and after the Holocaust in order to share her story for generations to come - a truly selfless act. Fritzie understood the value of her testimony to future generations and embraced the process, knowing she was taking Holocaust education to a new level and securing her legacy. Fritzie was accompanied with Cardinal Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago on this return to Auschwitz in July 2019. With the Cardinal as her companion, this trip became the subject of a 4-part program which aired on ABC7 Chicago entitled *Return to Auschwitz*. The series explored the history and lessons of the Holocaust and was hosted by news anchor Alan Krashesky, drawing record-breaking audiences; and

WHEREAS, Fritzie frequently spoke publicly about her experience and current issues. Again, demonstrating her willingness to embrace technology and all forms of storytelling, Fritzie was featured on Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's *Chicago Stories* podcast in April 2018, taped live at the Museum on the 75th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. On February 2, 2017, Fritzie joined other Holocaust survivors at a press conference to speak out against the Executive Order on immigration, which discriminated based upon religion, national origins, and ethnicity.; and

WHEREAS, Fritzie received numerous awards throughout her tenure as Museum president, including the Bertha Honoré Palmer Making History Award for Distinction in Civic Leadership awarded by the Chicago History Museum in 2016, the Global Citizenship Award from the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois in 2020, and in 2021, the Outstanding Community Leader Award from the Chicago Cultural Alliance; and

WHEREAS, Governor J.B. Pritzker, the first Chairman of the Museum's Board of Trustees, commented: "Fritzie wanted us to know that there are good people everywhere. Even in the most difficult, threatening, and horrific circumstances, goodness might be present. She spent much of her life teaching children and adults that we all need to be like the stranger who saved her life on the train that day at Auschwitz. 'One person can make a difference,' she always said." He continued, "Fritzie was that person who made a difference for many. She embodied the decency and kindness she implored from others. She was strong and faithful and caring. A fundamentally good person is gone today. I miss her already, and I will never forget her;" and

WHEREAS, Fritzie inspired countless individuals with her powerful message of hope and resilience following the darkness of the Holocaust. However, her proudest achievement was the family she built with her late husband, World War II veteran Norman Fritzshall. Fritzie and Norm cherished their son, Steve, their daughter-in-law, Hinda, and their grandsons, Scott and Andy. She also enjoyed a special relationship with her nieces and other family members; and

WHEREAS, "To know Fritzie and to understand Fritzie's life journey is to know a true humanitarian, a true hero in so many ways, a person of immense compassion, filled with humility and desire for a better world," said Jordan Lamm, Chair of the Museum's Board of Directors. Fritzie was a Holocaust survivor who made an extraordinary difference in the world. She exuded both openness and warmth and was always willing to strike up a conversation with a stranger - in an elevator, hallway, or on the sidewalk. Visitors to Illinois Holocaust Museum will continue to see her life's work in action every day as the institution she led continues to pursue its mission: *Remember the Past, Transform the Future*.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2

million residents of Cook County, honors the work and contributions of Fritzie Fritzshall, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions she 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 same be tendered to the family of Fritzie Fritzshall.