



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 21-0611, **Version:** 1

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### PROPOSED RESOLUTION

#### CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF JAMES B. (JIM) BURNS

**WHEREAS**, Jim Burns, long-time Inspector General for the Secretary of State, died Friday, December 11, 2020 at the age of 75. Burns took the post as federal investigators were continuing their Operation Safe Road corruption probe of the office under George Ryan. Secretary of State Jesse White described Burns as a “strong, visible and independent inspector general, and I am grateful for all he accomplished. Burns restored the public trust and changed the culture of the office. His legacy of honesty, fairness and transparency leaves an indelible mark on the secretary of state’s office and the state of Illinois. As a former U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Burns worked tirelessly in his role as inspector general to help restore integrity and eliminate all forms of institutionalized corruption and wrongdoing in the secretary of state’s office;” and

**WHEREAS**, born in Quincy and raised in McLeansboro (downstate), Illinois, Burns was an all-state basketball player who led the McLeansboro High School team to a fourth-place finish in the 1962 State Championship. He then played for Northwestern University from 1964-1967 where he led the team in scoring all three seasons. He was both an All-American and Academic All-American in 1967 and was All-Big Ten and Academic All-Big Ten in 1966 and 1967. He is still Northwestern’s 12th all-time scorer, 3<sup>rd</sup> in scoring average, 10<sup>th</sup> in both field goals and free throws made, and 6<sup>th</sup> in points in a game (40). He was inducted into the Northwestern Athletics Hall of Fame in 1992; and

**WHEREAS**, after college, Burns was selected by the Chicago Bulls in the fourth round (34<sup>th</sup> pick overall) of the 1967 National Basketball Association draft. He played three games as a shooting guard with the Bulls during the 1967-68 season with fellow McLeansboro native Jerry Sloan before joining the Dallas Chaparrals (1967-68) in the American Basketball Association; and

**WHEREAS**, following his professional basketball career, Burns returned to Northwestern where he earned his law degree. After graduation, Burns worked as a federal prosecutor from 1971 to 1978 eventually becoming chief of the criminal litigation division before moving to private practice. President Bill Clinton appointed Burns as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois in 1993. Burns led the U.S. attorney’s office during the Operation Silver Shovel corruption investigation and the Operation Haunted Hall ghost-payroll prosecution. His office also took on the Gangster Disciples street gang as well as several high-profile cases involving the violent El Rukn street gang, public corruption, international drug smuggling, organized crime, white collar financial fraud and environmental and civil rights violations. He held the post until 1997; and

**WHEREAS**, Burns gave up his federal prosecutor’s post to seek the Democratic Party nomination for governor in 1998. This followed an earlier foray into politics when, in 1990, he was Neil Hartigan’s lieutenant governor pick for the Democratic Party gubernatorial slate; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2000, he was named to the Inspector General’s job by Secretary of State Jesse White. During his tenure, Burns expanded the size of the office, hired professional investigators from a variety of backgrounds, initiated legislation that made the post permanent, and broadened its reach. He created a website and hotline to allow the public or employees to make complaints, established an audit review committee, and strengthened relationships with outside law enforcement agencies resulting in several prosecutions; and

**WHEREAS**, Burns also had a distinguished career in private practice, serving as a regulatory partner with Isham,

Lincoln and Beale from 1978-1987 and then a defense and regulatory partner with Keck, Mahin and Cate from 1987-1993; and

**WHEREAS**, Burns is survived by his wife, Martha S. (Marty) Burns; three children, James (Kia) Burns, Camille Burns, and Heather (Ajay Naidu) Burns; and one grandchild, Jaany Burns. He will be missed by his former teammates, friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues.

**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 life and contributions of Jim Burns, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he 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 Jim Burns.