



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE WORK AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF KAREN SINGER

WHEREAS, after serving nearly two decades, current President and CEO Karen Singer has announced she will retire from YWCA Evanston/North Shore (YWCA E/NS). Since Singer joined the organization in 2005 it has doubled the number of participants served, launched its Equity Institute, increased private funding tenfold, and completed an \$18.5 million expansion that doubled its footprint; and

WHEREAS, under her leadership, the YWCA E/NS established the annual YWomen Leadership Awards to recognize the outstanding contributions that women in the community have made toward empowering women and eliminating racism (2008); expanded the relationship violence prevention program Building Healthy Relationships to include curricula for middle school and high school youth and the Campus Dating Violence program (2009); expanded the financial literacy program Basic Money Management to the community (2010); initiated the Equity Institute, positioning the organization as a resource and leader in working to achieve equity, began the Community Conversations on Race Series, Let's Talk at Lunch, and Anti-Racism Training (2011); began sponsoring the Stand Against Racism, an annual event held the last Friday in April that draws 10,000 participants and encourages communities and community members to acknowledge racial inequity and work for change (2012); began the Equity Summit as a way to bring people of all ages and demographics together to deepen their understanding of their own racial identities, develop skills to work for change, formulate action plans, and engage with others (2016); launched YW Culinary, a 12-week job training program designed to prepare women for success in Chicagoland's vibrant food service industry (2018); acquired two social enterprises: YWCA Shop for Good and the Crowded Closet to provide low cost clothing and volunteer opportunities from which 100% of profits help support YWCA's domestic violence and economic empowerment programs (2018 and 2020); and launched the YW Tech Lab (initially known as YWeb Career Academy) in partnership with Oakton Community College to provide education in digital skills to traditionally underrepresented or vulnerable populations, such as women of color, survivors of domestic violence, and low-wage workers (2021); and

WHEREAS, under Singer's leadership, the YWCA assumed sponsorship of the Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate. The race began as a neighborhood walk/vigil after Northwestern University Basketball Coach Ricky Byrdsong was murdered by a white supremacist while running in his Skokie neighborhood with his son and daughter. The annual walk/vigil morphed into a race organized by Coach Byrdsong's wife, Sherialyn, and supporters to commemorate the Evanston and Skokie communities' stance against racist hate. In 2006, Sherialyn entrusted the race to the YWCA E/NS to ensure its continued stewardship. The race has become a popular community event on the north shore that includes walk/races for adults and children and annually draws several thousand participants. It is held every year on Father's Day; and

WHEREAS, along with these innovative programs, the YWCA E/NS continued its ongoing work of providing sex education and violence prevention education in schools and in the community; support in the form of housing, supportive services, and children's programs for victims of domestic violence; daycare and after school programs; scholarships for swim programs to foster equitable access for all youth to learn the lifesaving skill of swimming; and other recreational programs; and

WHEREAS, Singer worked hard during her tenure to solidify the finances of the organization. An unrestricted gift of \$9 million in November 2020 increased the organization's sustainability for generations to come. Completion of the \$18.5 million capital campaign launched the new YWCA campus expansion, doubling its footprint and programmatic impact;

and

WHEREAS, Jennifer Steans, YWCA E/NS board member, commented, “Karen has been a remarkable leader. Her entrepreneurial spirit, laser focus on equity and empowering women, and ability to engage with potential donors and community leaders have served us incredibly well. She has positioned us for a steep growth trajectory under new leadership;” and

WHEREAS, in announcing her retirement, Singer said, “I am honored and grateful to have had the privilege of leading the mission-driven work of the YWCA. Eliminating racism and empowering women is our mission. Each is key to creating a world where all women and girls - especially women and girls of color - have the opportunity to thrive and achieve the vision they have for their lives.”

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 Karen Singer, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions she has 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 Karen Singer and to the YWCA Evanston/North Shore.