



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 18-2655, **Version:** 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

REMEMBERING DISTINGUISHED AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIAN AND BELOVED “GRIOT” DORIA DEE JOHNSON

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson, a woman whose exceptional leadership and great body of scholarly work examining the African American experience will long be remembered and treasured. In her short life she educated thousands and when she died, far too soon, at age the age of 56 she left behind countless friends, family and an international community enriched for having known her; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson was born in Evanston Illinois, the first of three children of Helen and Charles Johnson. Her exceptional talent revealed itself very early in her life. As a young student, she attended a Crawford family reunion near Abbeville, South Carolina where she learned the tragic history of her great-great-grandfather, Anthony Crawford, who had been the victim of lynching. His story was a part of a much broader, history of lynching in America, a vicious tool of racial control to suppress black civil rights. Doria established the Anthony Crawford foundation in his name; his heart-rending story and those of so many others provided the focus to her life’s work. On October 21, 2016, on the Centennial of his tragic death, she lead a pilgrimage of scholars, justice advocates, faith leaders and artists from across the country to a two day event entitled “Justice for Anthony Crawford, Freedom School and Speak Out.” She worked with Public Interest Attorney Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative to establish one of the few historical markers in the country dedicated to lynching, marking the site of her great-grandfather’s death; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson spent her academic and professional life examining the deeply complex and troubled story of the African American experience; she received her Bachelor of General Studies in History with honors from Roosevelt University and later received her Master of Arts degree in Afro-American Studies from the University of Wisconsin; she was pursuing a doctorate degree in U.S. history at the time of her death. She was a faculty member of Strayer University in Baltimore, Maryland and visiting scholar at the Newberry Library in Chicago. She was the resident scholar at the Shorefront Legacy Center in Evanston and served on the Board of the Evanston History Center; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson traveled the world educating those she met about the history of African Americans, becoming a well-known and much beloved Griot. The term is a West African word describing the vocal tradition of preserving genealogies and historical truth. Doria Dee Johnson essentially became a “world village” Griot sharing her work with thousands the world over. She was named a ‘change-agent’ by the Nelson Mandela Foundation. She was an international lecturer and participated in human rights initiatives in Palestine, Israel, South Africa, Europe, Sri Lanka, Chicago, Ferguson, Missouri and Cuba; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson was the Bill Lucy Justice Scholar-in-Residence at the Annual Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference inspiring faith leaders across the country to reclaim the narratives of faith and victory. She was largely credited with establishing the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference Truth Telling Commission that aligned with the United Nations Declaration of the Decade for the People of African Descent; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson’s extensive scholarship and leadership on the United States Senate Steering Committee for the Apology on Lynching culminated in securing a 2005 United States Senate apology for lynching. She played a role in insuring that Emmett Till’s casket rests in the archives in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC; and

WHEREAS, Doria Dee Johnson's exceptional work was regularly singled out for recognition. She was awarded many academic fellowships: the Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Fellowship; the University Wisconsin Advanced Opportunity Fellowship, the University of Chicago Black Metropolis Research Consortium Dissertation Research Fellowship and Yale University Summer Public History Institute Fellowship. She was selected one of three United States Representatives as scholar in the Nelson Mandela International Dialogues program of the Nelson Mandela Foundation; and

WHEREAS, the world has lost a great scholar, activist, storyteller, truth agent, memory worker and friend in Doria Dee Johnson. She will be sorely missed by friends, neighbors and colleagues. Her loss will be felt most acutely by her father Dr. Charles Johnson and her sister Christina Johnson; and

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 extraordinary life of Doria Dee Johnson, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable and innumerable 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 the same be tendered to the family of Doria Dee Johnson.