



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE LIFE AND WORK OF CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION PRESIDENT EMITA KAREN JENNINGS LEWIS WHO TRANSITIONED FROM THIS WORLD ON FEBRUARY 8, 2021

WHEREAS, Karen Jennings Lewis was a lifelong Chicagoan, the daughter of public school teachers and a proud product of Chicago Public Schools, who learned how to stand up for herself and her community as a student at her beloved Kenwood Academy High School; and

WHEREAS, from her days as the only Black woman in her class at Dartmouth College and throughout her life, Ms. Lewis exemplified how powerful, Black women can lead with strength, grace, dignity and love; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis was a renaissance woman, speaking three languages, mastering two musical instruments, a lover of opera, musical theater and comedy; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis met her beloved husband John Lewis as they both pursued their passion for education as teachers at Lane Tech, and celebrated 20 happy and fulfilling years together during her life; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis was a dedicated, skilled, life-long educator, having attained multiple degrees and National Board Certification, the highest honor awarded to educators; and

WHEREAS, as an educator, Ms. Lewis saw children as precious resources to be nurtured and loved in classrooms filled with joy, creativity and excitement - more than test scores or data points on a spreadsheet; and

WHEREAS, as president of the Chicago Teachers Union, Ms. Lewis worked to unify Chicago educators around a platform of common good demands to support the needs of the students, families and communities Chicago Public Schools serves; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis led the historic 2012 strike which demonstrated the renewed power and solidarity of the Chicago Teachers Union, helped reinvigorate Chicago's labor movement, and sparked the Red for Ed movement across the country demanding dignity and respect for educators and public schools; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis fearlessly confronted the rich and powerful who felt entitled to impose their privatization agenda on schools serving the predominantly low-income Black and Brown students who attend Chicago Public Schools and tirelessly fought for Chicago's children to receive the quality, well-resourced schools they deserve; and

WHEREAS, under her leadership, the Chicago Teachers Union fought the closing of 50 schools in Black and Brown neighborhoods, stalled charter school expansion that drains resources from public schools and pushed for fully-resourced, equitably funded neighborhood schools; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis helped reshape the political landscape in Chicago, paving the way for new, progressive, independent voices to win election at the state, county and city level; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis fought for the soul of public education, challenged education apartheid and transformed the education justice movement into a force to be reckoned with in the halls of power; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis used her voice to change the terms of debate about what ails our education system and force an honest conversation about the deep-seated racism and segregation that plague Chicago and its schools to this day; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Lewis empowered tens of thousands of Chicago teachers, families and students who joined her fight for the schools Chicago children deserve and continue to live by her principals and vision for a quality, equitable, well-funded public school system for all.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County hereby expresses its deep sadness over the passing of a remarkable educator and freedom fighter and with this resolution honors the life and work of Ms. Karen Jennings Lewis.