



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 THE HONORABLE BERNARD J. HANSEN

WHEREAS, Bernard J. Hansen (Bernie to everyone he met), 76, a former Chicago alderman from the 44th Ward who specialized in constituent services, died Sunday of complications from diabetes in Chandler, Arizona, where he had retired. He served as alderman from 1983 until 2003, through the administrations of four mayors: Jane M. Byrne, Harold Washington, Eugene Sawyer and Richard M. Daley; and

WHEREAS, a Lakeview native, Mr. Hansen went to Hawthorne grade school and Lane Tech High School. His mother Fern was a nurse, and his father Bernard was a factory worker, according to his family. He met Annette, his wife of 56 years, at Waveland Bowl when they were teens. "I bowled for St. Ben's and he bowled for Lane," Annette shared. Young Bernie was a dynamic high school baseball and football player who once got a lesson from pro football Hall of Famer George Blanda. After a head injury on the field, doctors feared he would be permanently impaired, his wife said, but he recovered and subsequently attended the University of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, before he was alderman, he was a longtime ward superintendent who prided himself on knowing the details of every street and alley in his ward. "They used to call him the 'alley' alderman," said Alderman Tom Tunney, Bernie's handpicked replacement as alderman. "He cared about the blocks, the alleys, the economic development and safety. He was an old-school politician who later in life became much more progressive as the community changed."

WHEREAS, up long before sunrise every day, he would drive through the ward to personally check on things that were of concern to residents. "All that before he headed into the office at 6:00 a.m.," said State Sen. Sara Feigenholtz. "He knew every pothole and every alley and every street in Lakeview. He did so much for so many people. Even if you were outside of the ward, he would take care of you. He was a true public servant", said his son David; and

WHEREAS, though Bernie was elected to the City Council in 1983 with roots in the late Mayor Richard J. Daley's political machine he was always open to change. When Harold Washington was elected mayor, Mr. Hansen regularly voted with the opposition bloc of aldermen; but he was one of the first to actively support Mayor Washington on any policy that benefitted the City; and

WHEREAS, Bernie's love of his community lead to his progressive advocacy that included passage of what he called his greatest accomplishment, the anti-discrimination Human Rights Ordinance. He regularly backed measures promoting gay rights, including providing health care and other benefits for the partners of city workers involved in same-sex relationships some 18 years before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the legality of same-sex marriage. His support for human rights legislation was a matter of "treating people the way they wanted to be treated ... whether they're Black, white, brown, pink or purple. Whatever," Hansen was quoted as telling the local Kiwanis Club in 2016. "Bernie spent nearly two decades serving the City Council working tirelessly to serve his constituents while taking a strong stance for human rights. His work undoubtedly made our city a better place," observed Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot; and

WHEREAS, Bernie was alderman during the battle over installing lights for night games at Wrigley Field. With any community issue he always supported citizen participation and encouraged vigorous debate. He backed retrofitting factories as lofts in addition to recycling requirements for businesses and residents. He pushed for crackdowns on Wrigley Field ticket scalpers and the rowdiness he said was linked to Medusa's, once an all-ages Lakeview juice bar and famed nightlife spot; and

WHEREAS, “No one was better at getting things done than Bernie and the communities he served were better for it. He taught me that public service is what we each owe our communities,” noted U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley. “Bernie taught me that policy only matters when it works at the street level,” Quigley said. Others mentored by Hansen were former state Senate President John Cullerton, current state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz and former DNC Chair David Wilhelm.

WHEREAS, Bernie was “the definition of a great public servant” who displayed “street smarts, political wisdom, a wicked sense of humor” while also being a “die-hard Cubs fan. Bernie turned this neighborhood around and made it the safer and more desirable ward it is today,” Feigenholtz said; and

WHEREAS, when he retired from the City Council for health reasons in 2003, he picked Tom Tunney as a replacement, making Tunney the city’s first openly gay alderman. “He oversaw transformational changes in our neighborhood and helped build the thriving community we share today,” Tunney posted on Twitter. “His wisdom and humor will be missed but the 44th Ward family is strong thanks to his leadership”; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his service as an alderman, President William Clinton appointed Bernie to serve as one of four U.S. commissioners to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission from 1994 to 2000. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is a bilateral treaty organization of the United States and Canada responsible for fisheries management research and recommendations and for sea lamprey control of the Great Lakes fisheries. This was a perfect assignment for Bernie whose 44th Ward borders Lake Michigan. When it was the United States turn to Chair the Commission, Bernie was elected Chair because of his great knowledge of Great Lake fishing; and

WHEREAS, Hansen is survived by his wife, Annette, sons Paul and David and two grandchildren.

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 the Honorable Bernard J. (Bernie) Hansen, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he 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 Bernard J. (Bernie) Hansen.