



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 22-6505, **Version:** 1

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### PROPOSED RESOLUTION

#### HONORING BERNICE WEISSBOURD FOR HER LIFE OF SERVICE

**WHEREAS**, Bernice Weissbourd, 99, a researcher who built on her experience as a Head Start teacher to become a national leader in promoting the critical role of families in their children's early childhood development, died October 12 at her home in Evanston; and

**WHEREAS**, Bernice (nee Targ) was born in 1923 on Chicago's South Side. She studied classical piano at the Juilliard School in New York. Music remained a joyous part of her life; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1946, she married Bernard Weissbourd, a scientist who worked on the Manhattan Project, lawyer, real estate developer, and civic leader. Lifelong companions, they were devoted to family, community, and progressive action. They had four children and moved to Evanston in 1959; and

**WHEREAS**, Weissbourd began her career as a music teacher. When her youngest child started school in 1962, Weissbourd began her early childhood career in earnest, becoming an early childhood teacher and program director for many years before becoming a national leader in the early child development and family support movement; and

**WHEREAS**, her experience as a Head Start teacher and family center supervisor in the Henry Horner Homes in the 1970s convinced her that early childhood development was important to the future success of those children. "We found that the children who were most self-confident, open and engaged with others had parents who knew the detailed aspects of their children's needs, likes, and dislikes," she wrote in a biography. "It seemed clear that so much of the die was cast early for these children; one could almost predict which children would lead full lives," she wrote; and

**WHEREAS**, with that insight, Weissbourd spent a year researching the principles behind what would become her Family Focus nonprofit, a center for toddlers that focused as much on teaching the parents as on teaching the kids. The idea behind the centers was revolutionary at the time. Mrs. Weissbourd became a champion of early childhood development programs that understood that parents need to be educated as much as children to help them both thrive. She popularized the idea that the first three years of a child's life are critical to their development and later success in life and that the relationship between child and parent is paramount; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1976, Weissbourd co-founded the first Family Focus center for toddlers in Evanston. Its purpose was to provide community-based support for families with young children. There are now seven centers in the Chicago area. The centers helped develop the relationship between child and parent to help them both grow. "It's not just the baby who's developing, it's the parents who are developing," Langford Carter said. The nonprofit became was a model for more than 20,000 programs still operating today in schools and neighborhoods around the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1981, Weissbourd was the impetus for organizing a national meeting of state and local advocates for family support, professional and academic leaders, and families themselves to share their ideas and experiences. The Family Resource Coalition (later named Family Support America) emerged from this meeting to become the national voice for family support, with Weissbourd serving as its president; and

**WHEREAS**, a few years later, she was instrumental in founding Chicago's Ounce of Prevention Fund, which used the principles of family support in its programs for teen parents; and

**WHEREAS**, Weissbourd's national public and civic service included serving as president of the American Orthopsychiatric Association and vice president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She served as a congressional appointee to the National Commission on Children and on the administration for Children's and Families' Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers, which established Early Head Start; and

**WHEREAS**, a prolific writer, Weissbourd wrote a column on 2-year-olds for *Parents* magazine for more than 15 years and co-authored two books: *America's Family Support Programs* (1987) and *Putting Families First: America's Family Support Movement and the Challenge of Change* (1994). She was a lecturer at the University of Chicago's School of Service Administration from 1994 to 1999; and

**WHEREAS**, having come of age during years of extraordinary economic and political turmoil, she developed a keen interest in the possibilities for progressive change that guided her many political and philanthropic engagements and stayed with her until the end of her days. Throughout her life, she was committed to racial and economic justice. She left the world better than she found it; and

**WHEREAS**, Weissbourd held positions on childcare advisory boards and served two terms as advisory council chair for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; and

**WHEREAS**, the Evanston nonprofit Weissbourd founded, Family Focus, is still in operation at 2010 Dewey Avenue, Evanston, IL. It became the source of what are now national standards on how to positively impact children; and

**WHEREAS**, family and community were not just professional preoccupations. Mrs. Weissbourd was devoted to her family and to her extraordinary community of friends of all ages. She was known by all for her warmth and generosity. She delighted in gathering friends and family in her home; and

**WHEREAS**, her husband, Bernard Weissbourd, died in 2000. Mrs. Weissbourd is survived by her four children, Richard (Avery), Burt (Dorothy), Ruth Grant (Steve) and Robert (Marie), eleven grandchildren and seven great-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 Bernice Weissbourd for her years of service and expresses its sincere appreciation for the work she has done for the residents 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 Bernice Weissbourd.