



# Office of the City Clerk



R2012-873

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## City Council Document Tracking Sheet

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	9/12/2012
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	Chandler, Michael D. (24)
<b>Type:</b>	Resolution
<b>Title:</b>	Tribute to late Mahaley Somerville
<b>Committee(s) Assignment:</b>	

## **TRIBUTE TO MAHALEY SOMERVILLE**

WHEREAS, God in His Infinite Wisdom and Judgment has called to her Eternal Reward Mahaley Somerville, an outstanding community activist and well-respected member of her community; and

WHEREAS, Mahaley Somerville was brought into this life on July 26, 1921, as the daughter of a farm family in Artesia, Mississippi. In 1942, she moved to Chicago with her husband and worked in a laundry for the railroads. To their union, seven children were born. A heart-breaking tragedy was brought upon her when her 10 month-old baby boy, Robert Earle, was abducted in 1951 and never found. Still, he was kept in her heart, memories and conversations; and

WHEREAS, In 1988, at the age of 67 and after years of providing care and aid for her dying mother, Mahaley Somerville joined the staff of Illinois Acorn and led the fight in Lawndale to stop illegal dumping in that predominately African American neighborhood. She led groups of community residents and pushed city officials to enforce the law against the illegal dumpers who used vacant lots in the poorer communities to “fly-dump” trash. In 1994, she joined political strategist Richard Barnett to “dump” the incumbent alderman, resulting in his losing the first round of city council election the following year; and

WHEREAS During the Savings and Loan bailout of 1989 and 1990, Mahaley Somerville fought for working families right to bid first on foreclosed homes instead of absentee investors and succeeded with a cost. Believing that anyone out for justice should be prepared for jail time, she was arrested taking action in Elk Grove Village where activists brought trash from from the vacant homes that the government agency, Resolution Trust Corporation, owned as a result of their policy of selling foreclosures to investors rather than to someone who would live in them. She also got arrested in Washington D.C. in the 1990's during the protest in support of the Community Reinvestment Act that gave loans to creditworthy homebuyers in African American and Latino neighborhoods. Her praiseworthy actions so moved U. S. Representatives Maxine Washington and Joe Kennedy, they bailed her out and testified on her behalf at her trial; and

WHEREAS, In 2003, at the age of 81, Mahaley Somerville took action in support of Doris Rodgers, a woman of the same age whose heat was been turned off. She marched down to the downtown offices of the Republican Party and refused to leave until President George W. Bush released emergency home heating funds. Once again she was arrested and the news media picked up Ms. Rodgers' plight. Within a few days, the heat in that apartment was turned back on and shortly thereafter the emergency funds were released and Congress approved an increase in funding the following year; and

WHEREAS, On July 26, 2006, Mayor Richard M. Daley and City Council recognized Mahaley Somerville with a resolution expressing gratitude for her longtime community service on her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday; and

WHEREAS, Mahaley Somerville voluntarily participated in a hunger strike called by the Grassroots Collaborative, in 2009, to protest potential state budget cuts in education, childcare, elder homecare, and healthcare. Despite her age of 87, she maintained a juice and water diet for three days; and

WHEREAS, With a group organized by U. S. Representative Danny Davis, Mahaley Somerville was able to attend President Barack Obama's inauguration; and

WHEREAS, Mahaley Somerville passed away peacefully in her sleep on August 5, 2012 after a lifetime of activism and accolades from the Cook County Board, the Chicago City Council the Congressional Black Caucus, the Bobbie Wright Mental Health Center, and Action Now. Her diligence and devotion provided many communities and citizens with a better life; and

WHEREAS, Mahaley Somerville leaves behind her seven children as well as many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, The Honorable Michael Chandler, Alderman of the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward, has informed this august body of the passing of this noteworthy activist; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED That we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago gathered here this 12<sup>th</sup> Day of September, 2012, do hereby express our deepest condolences of the passing of Mahaley Somerville and extend to her family and friends our deepest sympathy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That, from this day forth, each July 26 be declared "Mahaley Somerville Social Justice Day" in Chicago.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Mahaley Somerville.

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MICHAEL CHANDLER  
Alderman – 24<sup>th</sup> Ward