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R2013-421

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City Council Document Tracking Sheet

Meeting Date:	4/10/2013
Sponsor(s):	Mitts, Emma (37)
Type:	Resolution
Title:	Gratitude extended to Leola Spann
Committee(s) Assignment:	

A Resolution Honoring the Life & Legacy of Leola Spann

ADOPTED BY The City Council

Of the City of Chicago, Illinois

Presented by Alderman Emma Mitts on April 10, 2013

WHEREAS, There was once a woman named Leola Spann, who was both tender and tough, as well as a grandmotherly yet fiery advocate for the poor and disenfranchised. Mrs. Spann was well-known, revered and respected as a formidable force devoted to improving opportunities in Chicago's Austin neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Leola Spann was the longtime president of the Northwest Austin Council, (NAC); and

WHEREAS, During her 22-year with the Northwest Austin Council, Mrs. Spann launched multi-faceted efforts to introduce after-school programs, scolded slumlords into fixing there buildings and lead the first known lawsuit to use nuisance abatement laws to shut down a drug den. The Northwest Austin Council is located at 5780 W. Division St Chicago, IL 60651; and

WHEREAS, She fought tirelessly to rid the west side of drug dealers and gangs, while working with elected officials and police to improve the community's overall quality of life; and

WHEREAS, Leola Spann was a community organizer and activist, who stood up to neighborhood bullies, criminals and other negative forces, helped slow down speeders on the streets of Austin and fought big utility companies as a champion of the poor and elderly; and

WHEREAS, Leola Spann was committed totally to the Austin community and to the people who lived and worked there, calling them her 'heroes'; and

WHEREAS, She was considered the surrogate mother of the neighborhood, and throughout her long her activism career, she developed a well-earned reputation for blunt honesty, steely determination and integrity. The bottom line was that she was deeply respected by everyone who knew her, whether friend or foe; and

WHEREAS, Without Leola Spann, many of the things accomplished by Northwest Austin Council and by a diverse array of local clergy, community, business, and religious leaders and public officials out here would not have been accomplished; and

WHEREAS, She had no problem confronting the drug dealers and other negative forces impacting the community. She was also willing to work hard and try to organize people, to help them understand that the drug dealers are no stronger than what the community allows them to be; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Spann, died at age 71 of pulmonary fibrosis on Easter, March 27, 2005 at Joliet Community Hospice, where she had lived for a short time; and

WHEREAS, Born in Natchez, Miss., Mrs. Spann grew up in the deep South. She migrated up North with her family to Chicago in the late 1950s, with her first husband, Edward Williams. They eventually divorced in the late 1960s. In 1968, she took a second turn at matrimony, and married William Spann, who passed away in 1992; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Spann had a varied work history, having been employed at a foundry and on an airplane parts assembly line while raising three daughters. She returned to Mississippi in the mid-1970s to care for an ailing grandmother until she made her heavenly transition. When she returned to Chicago in 1983, she retired and moved next door to her daughter Anita Brown in the Austin neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, According to her legend, within a short six month period, Mrs. Spann knew everyone who lived on the block. During her arrival in the area, it was during a transitional period for the neighborhood, when white residents were moving out and African-Americans and Hispanics were moving in; and

WHEREAS, Tensions between the races ran high, and as the white flight continued, Mrs. Spann somewhat angrily noticed that basic services were being ignored. Therefore she immediately mobilized residents to draw the city's attention to community concerns; and

WHEREAS, As a key leader in her community, Leola Spann was always willing to ask the hard but necessary questions - - such as 'Why can't we have this?', and 'Why don't we have this?'; and

WHEREAS, As part of her newfound activism, Mrs. Spann volunteered at the Northwest Austin Council and quickly worked her way up from answering phones to being executive director, then president, a role she held until her death. She just had a love for people and she just wanted people to be treated fairly; and

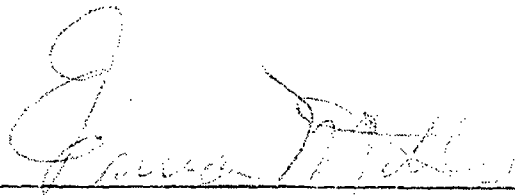
WHEREAS, Mrs. Spann's grass-roots methods helped build the Northwest Austin Council into a group that made positive changes in the community, a legacy that lasts even today; and

WHEREAS, Because Mrs. Spann had witnessed first-hand the inequality and racism that existed, she committed her life and service to making sure that future generations didn't suffer like she had; and

WHEREAS, After many years of dedicated service to the Austin community, she continued to give her time to working with local politicians in Chicago, working on whatever issues she could. Her heart was so big it had room for everyone with whom she crossed paths. Her love, and legacy of tremendous work is instilled in the hearts of many and her memory will live forever; and

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, That we, the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled the tenth day of April, 2013, do hereby applaud exceptional efforts on the behalf of the citizens of Chicago; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution will be presented to the family of Leola Spann as a sign of our sympathy and good well wishes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Emma Mitts", written over a horizontal line.

Emma Mitts, Alderman-37th Ward