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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. Eeola Spann was the longtime president of die Noithwesr. Austin Council, (NAC); and

WHEREAS, During her 22-year with die Northwest Ausdn 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 606751; and

WHEREAS, She. fought tirelessly to rid the west side of drug dealers ami 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 siood 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

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WHEREAS, Without Leola Spann, many (if* 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 in routing 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, she 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 die white flight, continued, Mrs. Spann somewhat angrily noticed dial basic services were being ignored. Therefore she immediately mobilized residents to draw the city's attention ro 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 diis;\ and Why don't we have thisi'>'; and 2 | P a g e

WHEREAS, As parr ol her newfound activism. Mrs. Spann \ oaaueereo at fN-Northwest Austin Council and quickly worked her way up from answering phones 10 being executive director, then president, a role she held until her death. She \.\>\ had a. love tor people and siie iust wanted people to he treated ianiv; and

WTIEREAS, Mrs. S]>ann's grass-roots methods helped build the Northwest Austin Council into a group that made positive change.-, in the cominimiliv. a legacv that lasts even loda\; and

WHEREAS, Because Mrs. Spann had witnessed Trst-hand the inequality and racism that exisied, she committed her life and sen-ice to making sure dial" future, generations didn't suiter like she had; and

WHEREAS, Alter many years of dedicated service to the Austin community, she continued to give her lime to working with local politician^ in Chicago, workmi; on whatever issues she could. Her heart was so big if had room for everyone with whom she crossed paths. Her love, and legacy of tremendous work is instilled at the hearts • of many and her memory will live forever;- , and

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, That we, the Mayor and Members of die City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled the tenth day of April, 201 ii do hereby applaud exceptional efforts on the behalf of the citi/ens of Chicago; and

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

Emma Mitts, A.lderman-87"" Warn

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