



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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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. 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 their 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 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

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WHEREAS, Without Leola Spann, many (if* die things accomplished hv 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 eon I routing the chug dealers and odicr negative forces impacting the. community. She was also willing to work hard and trv to organize people, to help them understand thai the drug dealers are no stronger than what the communiy allows them 10 be; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Spann, died ai age 71 of pulmonary fibrosis on Easter. March 27. 200,5 atjoiiet 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 1 :e>c.s with her first husband, Edward W illiams. 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 ai a foundry and on an airplane pans assembly hue while raising three daughters, She returned to Mississippi in the mid-1970s to care for an ailing grandmother una! she made her heavenly transition. When she returned to Chicago in 1.983, she re.'ired and moved next door to her daughter Anita Brown m die Austin neighborhood: and

WHEREAS, According to her legend, withm a short six monlh period. Mrs. Spann knew everyone who lived on the block. Dunng .her arrival in the are;?, u 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;\ arid Why don't we have thisi>'; and 2 | P a g e

WHEREAS, As part of her newfound activism. Mrs. Spann \ oaaueereo at fN-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 \.\>\ had a love for people and she just wanted people to be treated fairly; and

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

WHEREAS, Because Mrs. Spann had witnessed firsthand 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 at 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, 2011 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 Lucia Spann as a sign of our sympathy and good well wishes.

Emma Mitts, Alderman-87th Ward