



Office of the City Clerk

City Hall
121 N. LaSalle St.
Room 107
Chicago, IL 60602
www.chicityclerk.com

Legislation Text

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RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater was a former star lineman of the Iowa Hawkeyes; a trailblazing professional football player for nine full seasons in the National Football League; and the first African American jurist to become a member of the Superior Court of Cook County; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater has been praised by his peers as an NFL trailblazer and recognized by sports historians as one of the greatest linemen in college football history; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater was named All-Pro as a member of the Chicago Cardinals in seven different seasons; and

WHEREAS, for his many spectacular accomplishments both on and off the athletic field, and by paving the way for African-American players to compete and excel in the college ranks and at the professional level, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater deserves a rightful place of honor in the Professional Football Hall of Fame located in Canton, Ohio, but has thus far been denied; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago City Council has been informed of this disappointing omission by Alderman Edward M. Burke; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater, the eldest of six children born to George and Letha Slater in Normal, Illinois on December 9, 1898 spent his early childhood years on the South Side of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, at age thirteen he relocated with his family to Clinton, Iowa, where his father, the Reverend Mr. Slater, a respected Methodist minister, received appointment as a pastor; and

WHEREAS, pursuing his passion for football, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater played three full seasons for the Clinton High School varsity where he led the team to state championships in 1913 and 1914; and

WHEREAS, upon admission to the University of Iowa in 1918, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater joined the Iowa Hawkeyes coached by Howard Jones; and

WHEREAS, under Coach Jones' expert guidance and tutelage, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater, impervious to injuries and playing without a helmet during his collegiate career, developed into one of college football's most dominant lineman, leading his powerful 1921 Hawkeye team to a perfect 7-0 record on the way to winning the Big Ten championship; and

WHEREAS, despite his significant contributions to overall team success, Walter Camp, All-American Selector and regarded by many as "the Father of Modern Football," relegated the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater to second-team All American, not recognized as a "consensus All-American" by the NCAA; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater, began his professional career with the Rock Island Independents of the National Football League, thereby becoming the first African-American lineman in NFL history; and

WHEREAS, the NFL named the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater "All-Pro" from 1923-1925, and remained with the Independents until the team folded in 1926; and

WHEREAS, following the demise of the Independents and a re-alignment of NFL operations, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater played for the Milwaukee Badgers in 1922 and later the Chicago Cardinals, the city's famed South Side team founded by painting and decorating contractor Chris O'Brien; and

WHEREAS, during the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater's five remaining NFL seasons with the Cardinals (1926-1931), he started ninety-six of his ninety-nine games played and for a few years remained the only African-American player in league; and

WHEREAS, in 1934, two years after the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater retired from the game, the NFL imposed a "color ban" (that lasted for twelve years) barring African-American players from joining the league; and

WHEREAS, during this time of racial exclusion in professional football, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater fought bravely against the color ban by coaching various teams of star African-American players including the Chicago Negro League All-Stars in 1933, the Chicago Brown Bombers in 1937, the Chicago Comets and Duke Slater's All-Stars in 1939 and the Chicago Panthers a year later; and

WHEREAS, one career highlight among many in his stellar career occurred in 1937 when the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater served as assistant coach for the Chicago Negro All Stars in an exhibition game played against the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field; and

WHEREAS, through his leadership, example, and pioneering spirit, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater opened doors for African-American athletes and provided opportunity during an era of rampant racial segregation; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater earned a law degree from the University of Iowa in 1928; and

WHEREAS, during the Great Depression, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater accepted a position as head football coach at Douglass High school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, before returning to Chicago to serve as Assistant Corporation Counsel; and

WHEREAS, in January 1940, Governor Henry Horner appointed the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater to serve as Assistant Illinois Commerce Commissioner; and

WHEREAS, in 1948, The Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater became only the second African-American to be elected judge in the Municipal Court of Cook County, receiving over 960,000 votes; and

WHEREAS, after being assigned to the Wabash Avenue Court in one of the busiest police districts in Chicago, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater won re-election in 1954; and

WHEREAS, in 1960, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater became the first African-American judge elevated to the bench of the Superior Court of Cook County; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater moved over to the Circuit Court of Cook County in 1964, the year the modern-day court system organized; and

WHEREAS, actively engaged on many civic fronts, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater devoted considerable time to working with the South Side Boy's Club, Provident Hospital, the Boy Scouts and the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, six years after his passing on August 14, 1966, the University of Iowa renamed Iowa Stadium "Kinnick-Slater Stadium," after two former university star athletes, Heisman Trophy winner Nile Clarke Kinnick Jr., and the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater; and

WHEREAS, Nile Clarke Kinnick Jr., and The Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater were the first from their school to be elected into the College Football Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater was a Pro Football Hall of Fame finalist in 1970 and 1971, but his candidacy met with failure; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, his name dropped into the Senior's Pool which makes him eligible only through election as a Senior's candidate by a Hall of Fame committee that has repeatedly overlooked and bypassed him in favor of players of the post-World War II "modern era" of pro football; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater is most deserving of inclusion in the Pro Football Hall of Fame; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that we the Mayor and the members of the Chicago City Council on this sixth day of September, 2017, do hereby call upon the electors of the Pro Football Hall of Fame to give due consideration to the candidacy of the late and Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater and address this injustice by voting this most deserving 20th Century athlete into his rightful place in the Hall of Fame without further delay; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution shall be presented to the surviving family members of the Honorable Frederick Wayman "Duke" Slater and the Pro Football Hall of Fame.