

2023-J861

Senate Resolution No. 861

BY: Senator STEWART-COUSINS

MOURNING the death of Harry Belafonte,
Jamaican-American singer, songwriter, actor, and
humanitarian

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay just tribute to those musical geniuses whose commitment and creative talents contributed to the entertainment and cultural enrichment of their community and the entire State of New York; and

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is moved to mourn the death of Harry Belafonte, who died on Tuesday, April 25, 2023, at the age of 96; and

WHEREAS, Born Harold George Bellanfanti Jr. in Harlem, New York, on March 1, 1927, Harry spent much of his childhood traveling back and forth between New York City and his mother, Melvine's homeland of Jamaica; and

WHEREAS, Harry Belafonte proudly served his country as a member of the United States Navy for a short time before he began his long and distinguished career as a musician, first as a jazz and pop singer in

the New York City club scene; and

WHEREAS, In 1945, Harry Belafonte worked as a janitor's assistant at Harlem's American Negro Theatre where he saw his first show, Home is the Hunter, written by Samuel M. Kootz, and would eventually be given his first performing role in On Striver's Row in 1946; his legacy in Harlem will forever be cemented with the naming of the Harry Belafonte 115th Street Library in his honor; and

WHEREAS, In 1949, Harry Belafonte received his first recording contract, and by 1950, he started performing folk music, and was well on his way to stardom; and

WHEREAS, After the release of his first album in 1954, Harry Belafonte expanded his talents to the silver screen, breaking racial barriers in critically acclaimed hits like "Carmen Jones", which co-starred Dorothy Dandridge; and on the Great White Way where he won a Tony Award for his performance in the Broadway musical Almanac; and

WHEREAS, Two years later, Harry Belafonte invoked his many childhood memories of his mother's native Jamaica into Calypso, which topped the Billboard charts and sold more than one million copies, earning him the nickname "King of Calypso"; and

WHEREAS, The album contained timeless hits such as "Day-O (Banana Boat Song)," a traditional Jamaican folk song that would go on to become Harry Belafonte's signature track; in 2009, his version of this well-known song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Harry Belafonte won an Emmy in 1960 for outstanding performance in a variety or musical program for "The Revlon Revue:

Tonight With Belafonte", making him the first Black person to win an Emmy; and

WHEREAS, Harry Belafonte was also the recipient of a Kennedy Center Honor in 1989, the National Medal of Arts in 1994, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000; and

WHEREAS, In addition to his role as a much-loved entertainer, Harry Belafonte was a staunch and stalwart supporter of civil rights issues, and other causes, such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement where he befriended Nelson Mandela; he also organized support for the fight against HIV/AIDS and became a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador; and

WHEREAS, Moreover, Harry Belafonte came up with the idea for recording the 1985 hit song, "We Are the World," which assembled a group of pop and rock stars to raise money for famine relief in Africa; and

WHEREAS, In 1968, Harry Belafonte once again broke barriers by becoming the first Black person to host a late-night TV show when he assumed hosting duties on "The Tonight Show" amid national civil rights protests, welcoming guests like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy; and

WHEREAS, Harry Belafonte is survived by his wife, Pamela; three daughters, Adrienne Belafonte Biesemeyer, Shari Belafonte, and Gina Belafonte; one son, David Belafonte; two stepdaughters, Sarah Frank and Lindsey Frank; eight grandchildren, Rachel Blue, Brian, Maria, Sarafina, Amadeus, Mateo, Olive, and Zoe; as well as numerous friends, colleagues and fans who will long cherish the many gifts he has given to the world; and

WHEREAS, Harry Belafonte was a man of many causes and interests and

truly captivated his fans with his multi-dimensional talent; his music helped break Caribbean music through to a global audience, and his tireless efforts to make the world a better place to live, work and play will never be forgotten; and

WHEREAS, Through his genius and passion, Harry Belafonte touched the hearts of people across the globe through his warm smile, immeasurable talent, and for his unremitting commitment to those who were less fortunate; and

WHEREAS, As the news of his death reaches the masses, many of us will be singing the lyrics and dancing in our chairs to the smooth Calypso beat of his most memorable songs; and

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to remember the life and accomplishments of legendary musician, Harry Belafonte, whose illustrious career will forever live in the hearts of many and continue to inspire generations to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Harry Belafonte, and to express its deepest condolences to his family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Harry Belafonte.