

## 2009-K1116

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION paying tribute to the life and accomplishments of The Honorable Jane Bolin, the first African-American female judge in the United States of America

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor those singular individuals who devoted their purposeful lives to preserving the rights and protecting the welfare of the citizens of their community and the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, it is the sense of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to the life and accomplishments of The Honorable Jane Bolin, the first African-American female judge in the United States of America; and WHEREAS, Judge Jane Bolin died on Monday, January 8, 2007, at the age of 98; and

WHEREAS, The youngest daughter of Gaius C. Bolin and Matilda Bolin, Jane Matilda Bolin was born on April 11, 1908, in Poughkeepsie, New York; her father was a lawyer and the first African-American graduate of Williams College, and her mother died when she was eight years old; and WHEREAS, Throughout her childhood, she spent a great deal of her time with her father in his law office; from that exposure, she was determined to become a lawyer herself; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from high school, Jane Bolin entered Wellesley College in 1924, one of only two African-American freshmen women; her isolated life at Wellesley was made more difficult by the lack of encouragement she received from her professors; and

WHEREAS, Although she graduated in 1928 as a "Wellesley Scholar" and one of the top 20 students in her class, her academic advisor discouraged her from pursuing a legal career on the grounds that there could be no future for an African-American woman attorney; and

WHEREAS, Even Jane Bolin's father, who wished to shield her from the unpleasant side of the legal profession, opposed her interest in the law; he preferred the more proper life of a teacher for his bright young daughter; however, she applied and was accepted at Yale University Law School, and only then did she reveal her plans to her reluctant father who gave her his guarded blessings; and

WHEREAS, Jane Bolin matriculated at Yale University, and in 1931, became the first African-American woman to graduate from Yale Law School; and

WHEREAS, Jane Bolin passed the bar exam in 1932, and practiced in her father's firm during the first two years of her legal career; after her marriage to lawyer Ralph Mizelle in 1933, the couple moved to New York; they practiced together until Jane was hired to become the first African-American woman to serve as Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of New York; and

WHEREAS, In 1939, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia appointed the then 31-year-old Jane Bolin to be Judge of the Domestic Relations Court (renamed the Family Court in 1962), where she served with distinction for 40 years; and

WHEREAS, In her work as the first African-American woman judge, she viewed the many different kinds of legal trouble a family could experience, including spousal abuse and neglected children, as well as homicides committed by juveniles; and

WHEREAS, During her years on the bench, Judge Bolin brought revolutionary changes to New York's legal bureaucracy; among them were the assignment of probation officers to individuals without regard to race or religion, and the assurance that private childcare agencies that

received public funding must accept children, regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, Judge Bolin's only child, Yorke Bolin Mizelle, was born during her early years on the bench; her husband died two years after

her son's birth, and she was a single parent until her remarriage seven years later to clergyman Walter Offutt Jr.; he died in 1974, after being married for 25 years; and

WHEREAS, Judge Bolin retired, quite reluctantly, in 1979, after reaching mandatory retirement age; she went on to serve on the New York State Board of Regents, where she reviewed disciplinary cases; and

WHEREAS, Judge Bolin served on the National Board of the NAACP, as well as the boards of the National Urban League, the Child Welfare League and the Dalton School; and

WHEREAS, Judge Bolin, along with Eleanor Roosevelt, helped re-establish the Wiltwyck School for Boys as a non-sectarian and interracial rehabilitative center for juveniles; her lifetime of helping people was recognized by many, including Morgan State University, Western College for Women, Tuskegee Institute, Hampton University and Williams College, all from which she received honorary degrees; and

WHEREAS, Judge Jane Bolin is survived by her son, Yorke; a granddaughter; and one great-granddaughter; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit, imbued with a sense of compassion, and comforted by a loving family, Judge Jane Bolin leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all she served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to pay tribute to the life and accomplishments of The Honorable Jane Bolin, first African-American female judge in the United States of America; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Judge Jane Bolin.