

2013-J3488

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION mourning the death of Ernest A. Smith, Jr., distinguished citizen and devoted member of his community, on December 1, 2013

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

WHEREAS, It is with great sorrow and deep regret that this Legislative Body records the passing of Ernest A. Smith, Jr., distinguished citizen and devoted member of his community, on Sunday, December 1, 2013, at the age of 91, noting the significance of his purposeful life and accomplishments; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. was born in Harlem, New York, on November 6, 1922; the youngest child of Ernest A. Smith and Roslyn A. Simms Smith, he grew up during the Harlem Renaissance and graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on September 18, 1943; the Marine Corps was the last of the armed services to integrate and his basic training took place in the substandard barracks known as Montford Point located next to Camp LeJeune, North Carolina; he and his fellow first African-American Marines became known as Montford Point Marines; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr., despite having to endure the discrimination of southern Jim Crow laws and unequal, segregated treatment in the Marine Corps, was true to the Marine Corps motto and faithfully served his country in World War II; he was confirmed to have made a landing on the island of Saipan in the Pacific Theatre, and honorably discharged on April 11, 1946, with the rank of Corporal; and

WHEREAS, After returning home from the war, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. created a path to further his education; he enrolled in St. Dunstan's University in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island and he was the first African-American to attend and graduate from the University; he received his bachelor's degree in 1951, and went on to earn a master's degree in Social Work from the University of Ottawa in 1954; and

WHEREAS, During his studies in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. met the love of his life, Wanda A. MacPhee, a nursing student who completed her studies in 1951; she immigrated to the United States, and they were married in 1952 in New York City; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. and his wife moved to Goshen, New York, in 1954 and were able to purchase a home as an interracial couple; there they raised a large family; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. had a successful career in social work and human service program administration, retiring from the Catholic Charities Brooklyn Diocese; in 1976 he received honors for his Brooklyn community-based work and recognition from United States Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. was the first Director of Social Services at what was then the Pius XII School in Sugar Loaf, New York, and, during the Carter Administration, he was appointed and served on the White House Committee on Aging; in addition, he taught as an adjunct professor at Rockland Community College, and was instrumental in helping to establish the foundation for what is now the Orange County Department of Mental Health where he was a part-time family counselor; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr.'s commitment to excellence, and his spirit of humanity, carried over into all fields of enterprise, including charitable and civic endeavors; and

WHEREAS, He was a dedicated parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church in Goshen for 58 years; and

WHEREAS, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. was a lifetime member of the New York Metro 3 Montford Point Marine Association, and, in June 2012, at the age of 89, he and the other surviving Montford Point Marines were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal at a Washington D.C. ceremony; his daughter, Colonel Stephanie C. Smith, served on special assignment for the Commandant of the Marine Corps to help make the Montford Point Marine medal a reality; and

WHEREAS, Predeceased by his wife, Wanda A. MacPhee Smith; daughter, W. Antoinette deGoede; parents, Ernest A. Smith and Roslyn A. Simms Smith; siblings and in-laws: Eustace and Louise Smith, Clarence and Vivian Smith, Frank and Frances Smith, Harold Smith, Lester Smith, and Carmen and Wilfred Brodnax; Ernest A. Smith, Jr. is survived by his children and grandchildren: Dr. Deborah M. Smith and Dr. Allen Herman, and their children: Andrew, Robia and Nicholas; Andrea M. Smith; Alanna M. Smith and Peter G. Devito; Leah and Larry Pengel, and their children: Lawrence and Eric; son-in-law, Christian deGoede and grandson, Nathan and his wife, Crystal; Peter E. and Isabel Smith, and their children: Cassandra, Jessica, Shannon and her wife, Mary Mooneyhan, Antonette, Amelia, Karissa and Robbie; Paul M. Smith; Neila A. Smith, and her children: Jacob and Ellen Kennedy; Sheilagh C. Smith, and her children: Carter and Cole Banks; Col. Stephanie C. Smith, USMC (Ret.), and her children: Neil and Naomi Bumgarner; Aimee and William Bywater, and their children: Liam and Zechariah; nieces: Tena Molinar and Gloria Howard; and great-grandchildren: Dominic, Natalia, Antonio and Holland; as well as many cousins and friends; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Ernest A. Smith, Jr. leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Ernest A. Smith, Jr., distinguished citizen and devoted member of his community; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Ernest A. Smith, Jr.