

## 2013-K1100

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION celebrating the life and accomplishments of legendary Buffalo Bills founder and owner Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to the lives of those esteemed individuals of world renown who distinguished themselves through their life's work; and

WHEREAS, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., founder and owner of the Buffalo Bills, died on Tuesday, March 25, 2014, in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, at the age of 95; and

WHEREAS, In 1959, along with seven other men, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. started the American Football League at a time in America when baseball was the number one sport and the country's self-described national pastime; and

WHEREAS, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. chose Buffalo for the home of the Bills for having good attendance in the All-America Conference, a league which played from 1946 until 1949; he believed it was a good football city, an industrial city similar to Detroit on a smaller scale, and because Buffalo had been without football for 10 years and wanted it back; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame; of the eight original Foolish Club members, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. was the only one who kept his team in its original city; remaining true to Buffalo, his dedication to the city is one reason why he was inducted into the Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Born in Columbus, Ohio, on October 17, 1918, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. moved to Detroit when he was a youngster; he attended the University of Virginia and later attended law school at the University of Michigan; and

WHEREAS, He served his country as a member of the United States Navy during World War II; within a year, he earned his commission and served

aboard minesweepers in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters; and  
WHEREAS, After the war, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. took over his father's  
successful insurance business and invested in Michigan-area mines and  
factories; eventually, he purchased several manufacturing outlets,  
construction firms and radio stations, and founded Ralph Wilson Indus-  
tries; and

WHEREAS, Although he was an extremely successful businessman, the  
Buffalo Bills were always Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s number one love; for  
most of his tenure as owner, he attended all of the games, home and  
away; and

WHEREAS, During the AFL years, Ralph C. Wilson was one of the most  
influential men in the league; not only did he build one of its strong-  
est teams, he also played a vital role behind the scenes in some of the  
most important of pro football's history-shaping events such as helping  
the AFL procure its first big-time television contract in 1964, a deal  
in which NBC paid each club \$900,000 annually; and

WHEREAS, The NFL began to consider a merger with the AFL and, in 1970,  
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s dream of owning an NFL franchise was realized  
when the Buffalo Bills and the other seven AFL teams began playing in  
the NFL; and

WHEREAS, Over the next forty years, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. was an active  
member of the ownership group and he chaired committees relating to  
issues on pensions, labor, Super Bowl sites, expansion and realignment;  
and

WHEREAS, Voted by THE BUFFALO NEWS as western New York's "Top Sports  
Figure" in the past millennium, and described once by a writer as the  
"conscience of the NFL," Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. leaves behind a legacy  
nearly unrivaled in professional sports franchise ownership; and

WHEREAS, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. successfully operated the Bills out of  
Buffalo, New York, for more than 50 years, even when the economic  
climate in the league, as well as the country, made it difficult; and

WHEREAS, During his ownership, the franchise won two American Football League championships (1964-65) and, after the 1970 AFL-NFL merger, four consecutive American Football Conference championships (1990-93); and

WHEREAS, Today, the Buffalo Bills continue to draw sellout crowds to the stadium in Orchard Park which bears Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s name; and

WHEREAS, A valued and involved member of his community, this remarkable man established the Ralph Wilson Medical Research Foundation, which has contributed to high-risk/high-impact biomedical research; contributed to the development of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Athletic Field for the NFL Youth Education Town Center in Detroit; and helped procure grants for Buffalo-area athletics fields; and

WHEREAS, Ralph C. Wilson's selfless humanitarian spirit benefitted food banks of Buffalo and Rochester, Ronald McDonald House, the United Way, the S.P.C.A., the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Shea's Performing Arts Center and the Hospice Center of Western New York; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, his generosity supported education by establishing scholarship programs at a number of colleges such as St. John Fisher College, home of the Bills' summer training camp since 2000, where he helped fund a building that houses the College of Education which is named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s life was a portrait of service, 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 celebrate the life and accomplishments of legendary Buffalo Bills founder and owner Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.