

## 2017-J150

Senate Resolution No. 150

BY: Senator BRESLIN

HONORING Robert Merce upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Paul J. Curran Award by the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York

WHEREAS, It is incumbent upon the people of the State of New York to recognize and acknowledge those within our midst who have made significant contributions to the quality of life therein; and

WHEREAS, Robert Merce has given not only of his time and energies but also of his competence, intelligence and leadership and consequently has been designated for special honor; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to honor Robert Merce upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Paul J. Curran Award by the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York; and

WHEREAS, The Paul J. Curran Award for Pro Bono Service was established in honor of the late Paul J. Curran, who served as the Chairman of Prisoners' Legal Services' Board of Directors for more than a decade; this auspicious award is presented to the volunteer who most embodies a commitment to defending the rights of incarcerated New Yorkers by providing pro bono services; and

WHEREAS, Robert Merce graduated from the University of Toledo in

1967, and received his law degree from Antioch Law School in 1979; during this time, he also served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Marshall Islands; and

WHEREAS, With a steadfast and unwavering commitment to assisting those who are incarcerated, Robert Merce began his illustrious career as a community organizer for Hawaii's Office of Economic Opportunity's anti-poverty program; and

WHEREAS, Upon taking his first prison case in the early 1990s, Robert Merce worked to reduce his client's sentence from life without parole to life with the possibility of parole and, eventually, was able to get his client released, in 2011, through the compassionate release program; and

WHEREAS, Robert Merce has continually demonstrated his appreciation of human life by representing prisoners in compassionate release cases; acting on his convictions, this esteemed man has spent his life advocating for broader prison reform policies; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, Robert Merce was instrumental in the successful organization of a group of community leaders traveling to Norway to learn about the correctional system, hailed as one of the most successful and humane systems in the world; and

WHEREAS, A true asset to the community, Robert Merce serves on Hawaii's Prison Reform Task Force, established in 2015 by the Hawaii State Legislature, and chairs two of its subcommittees; and

WHEREAS, Robert Merce also serves as the vice-president of the Board of Directors of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corp., a non-profit corporation that provides free or low-cost representation to Native

Hawaiians on land, water, prison and cultural issues; and

WHEREAS, In addition, he continues to represent terminally ill and debilitated inmates seeking compassionate release; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the entire period of his community service, a period of constructive involvement, Robert Merce has stood constant in dignity, good grace and humor; and

WHEREAS, Rare indeed is the impressive dedication shown by an individual for the benefit of others which Robert Merce has displayed throughout his life; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that when individuals of such noble aims and accomplishments are brought to our attention, they should be celebrated and recognized by all the citizens of this great Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Robert Merce upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Paul J. Curran Award by the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Robert Merce.