

2017-K637

Assembly Resolution No. 637

BY: M. of A. Lentol

COMMENDING Jonathan E. Gradess upon the occasion of his pending retirement after 39 years as Executive Director of the New York State Defenders Association

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize and pay tribute to those singular individuals who devote their lives and careers to preserving the rights and attending to the well-being of individuals in need throughout New York State, and

WHEREAS, Jonathan E. Gradess became the first Executive Director of the New York State Defenders Association in 1978, helping to shape its mission to improve the quality and scope of publicly supported legal representation to low income people,; and

WHEREAS, Throughout his career, Jonathan E. Gradess has both demonstrated and advocated for client-centered representation in individual cases and in the public defense system, and has served all New Yorkers as a leader on public defense and criminal justice issues; and

WHEREAS, Under the leadership of Jonathan E. Gradess, the New York State Defenders Association continues to provide public defense backup legal assistance services to over 6,000 public defense attorneys

(assigned counsel, public defenders, and legal aid lawyers) across the state, as well as providing technical assistance to county and state officials in the provision of public defense services; and

WHEREAS, Through the testimony and speeches of Jonathan E. Gradess before a variety of bodies, including this one, numerous officials at the local, state and national level learned the importance of quality public defense services in a justice system worthy of the name; and

WHEREAS, Through the many letters, opinion editorials, and other writings by Jonathan E. Gradess, thousands of people have been informed on important justice issues arising in the criminal and family court systems and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Jonathan E. Gradess has persevered in a broad quest for justice, advocating for human rights and recognizing human needs not just in courts but in prisons and other settings; and

WHEREAS, Jonathan E. Gradess has served all New Yorkers as an advocate and public policy leader on public defense and criminal justice issues, including the establishment of the Capital Defender Office, successful opposition to the death penalty, groundbreaking establishment of the Office of Indigent Legal Services in 2010, and the landmark state funding of public defense quality improvements in 2017; and

WHEREAS, Presented with numerous awards and accolades, Jonathan E. Gradess received, among many recognitions, the New York State Bar Association Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Delivery of Defense Services in 1985, the Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public

Affairs & Policy Distinguished Public Service Award in 1999; the New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers Gideon Award in 2002;

City of New York Bar Association Capital Punishment Committee 2016 Norman J. Redlich Award for Capital Defense Distinguished Service; the National Legal Aid & Defender Association Reginald Heber Smith Award in 2016; and the Capital Region Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union Carol S. Knox Award in 2016; 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 the great State of New York; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Jonathan E. Gradess upon the occasion of his retirement from 39 years of exemplary public service; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Jonathan E. Gradess.