

2017-K786

Assembly Resolution No. 786

BY: M. of A. Dickens

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION mourning the death of Wyatt Tee Walker, civil rights leader, pastor, and devoted member of his community

WHEREAS, It is with profound intent that this Legislative Body is moved to pay homage to a man of indomitable faith and dedication whose purposeful life and accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to give acclaim to individuals of great character whose lives exemplify the highest ideals of humanity; and

WHEREAS, With feelings of deepest regret, this Legislative Body records the passing of Wyatt Tee Walker, who died on Tuesday, January 23, 2018, at the age of 88, noting the loss of a citizen whose purposeful life and endeavors contributed so much to the quality of life in his community; and

WHEREAS, Wyatt Tee Walker was born to John Wise and Maude Pin Walker on August 16, 1929; after graduating from high school in Merchantville, New Jersey, he earned a bachelor's degree in both chemistry and physics from Virginia Union University in 1950; and

WHEREAS, In that same year, he married his wife, the former Theresa Ann Walker, and together the couple raised four beautiful children; and

WHEREAS, Three years later, Wyatt Tee furthered his education by obtaining his Master of Divinity from Virginia Union's Graduate School of Religion; later, in 1975, he received his Doctorate of Ministry degree from Colgate-Rochester Divinity School; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, Wyatt Tee Walker became the Pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia; during this time, he also held the title of President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Director of the state's Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); and

WHEREAS, This great man also founded the Petersburg Improvement Association (PIA) which was patterned after the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA); and

WHEREAS, In 1958, Wyatt Tee Walker became a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization headed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; in 1960, he was appointed Executive Director of SCLC and served as Dr. King's Chief of Staff, a position he held for the next four years; and

WHEREAS, Dedicated to the civil rights movement, Wyatt Tee Walker participated in a Freedom Ride, and was instrumental in organizing the 1963 March on Washington; and

WHEREAS, On March 7, 1965, Wyatt Tee Walker and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were part of a group of peaceful demonstrators who attempted to walk over the Edmund Pettus Bridge to Montgomery, the capitol of Alabama; unfortunately, the marchers were attacked by armed police,

turning what was meant to be a calm, peaceful day into a day that will forever go down in infamy, the conflict of Bloody Sunday; and

WHEREAS, As part of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s inner circle, Wyatt Tee Walker was with his mentor, idol, and friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he was tragically assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968; and

WHEREAS, On September 1, 1967, Wyatt Tee Walker relocated to New York City to become Pastor of Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem; under his luminous leadership, the congregation grew from 800 to 3,000 members; in 2004, he officially retired from this post; and

WHEREAS, Wyatt Tee Walker also served as Urban Affairs Specialist to New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, and in 1979, he published the first of several books, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change*; and

WHEREAS, During the 1980s, Wyatt Tee Walker became a member of the National Committee on the American Committee on Africa; in 1988, he co-founded the Religious Action Network of Africa Action to challenge the repressive apartheid system in South Africa, and served as Chair of the Central Harlem Local Development Corporation; and

WHEREAS, Eventually Wyatt Tee Walker moved back to Virginia where he taught classes at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University; and

WHEREAS, For his steadfast and unremitting commitment to his community and church, Wyatt Tee Walker was named one of America's "15 Greatest Black Preachers" by *Ebony Magazine* in 1993; he was also inducted into the Civil Rights "Walk of Fame" in Atlanta, Georgia, and

on January 18, 2009, during the inauguration events in Washington, D.C. for President Barack Obama, he was the recipient of the Keepers of the Flame Award at the African-American Church Inaugural Ball; and

WHEREAS, Our society is greatly benefited by the purposeful efforts of individuals who unite for the cause of improving the quality of life for others, and who proactively work toward the goal of dignity for all; Wyatt Tee Walker truly served his community and fellow man, making the world a kinder, more just place for everyone to live, play and work; and

WHEREAS, In appreciation of his life of commitment, dedication and substantial contribution, it is the intent of this Legislative Body to inscribe upon its records this tribute to the memory of Wyatt Tee Walker that future generations may know and appreciate his admirable character, his many benevolent deeds, and the respect and esteem in which he was held; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Wyatt Tee Walker, civil rights leader, pastor, 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 Wyatt Tee Walker.