



# City of Philadelphia

City Council  
Chief Clerk's Office  
402 City Hall  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

## RESOLUTION NO. 220152

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**Introduced February 17, 2022**

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**Councilmember Brooks**

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## RESOLUTION

Recognizing the strength, determination, and contributions of renowned physician, Philadelphia City Councilmember, and Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Dr. Ethel Allen, whose medical expertise and dedicated public service prioritized the City's most vulnerable residents and paved the way for future generations of independent Black women in Philadelphia politics.

WHEREAS, Dr. Ethel Allen was born in Philadelphia in 1929, as one of three children, to Mr. and Mrs. Sidney S. Allen. Dr. Allen attended then predominately white John W. Hallahan Catholic Girls' High School. She later attended West Virginia State College, a public historically Black university, where she majored in chemistry and biology with a minor in mathematics; and

WHEREAS, As a student, Dr. Allen was fascinated with politics. She managed a student council presidential campaign for a high school classmate. Later, she ran for West Virginia State College Council President, losing by only two votes; and

WHEREAS, After graduation, Dr. Allen worked for an Atomic Energy Commission Project. Meanwhile, she began attending Democratic and Republican national conventions and working tirelessly on local and national electoral campaigns; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Allen overcame almost insurmountable barriers for Black women in medical education by, after seven years of applications, finally being granted admission to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). At PCOM, Dr. Allen was the only African American and the only woman in the Obstetrics-Gynecology Society. She was also the only African American, and one of only two women in the Internal Medicine Society. Later in her medical career, she founded the Community Committee on Medical School Admissions, which served to increase the admission rates of Black students applying to medical school. She also served as a mentor to PCOM students; and

WHEREAS, As a physician practicing community medicine in Philadelphia, Dr. Allen referred to herself as a "ghetto practitioner," focusing her efforts on areas of Philadelphia that redlining

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and other racist practices had devastated through the years. This experience inspired her to run for a City Council seat, where she planned to fight against poverty and crime for all of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Allen ran a fiery campaign in the Fifth Council District and beat her opponent, a three-term white incumbent by nearly 4,000 votes. At the time, the Fifth District's population was 60 percent Black and included sections of Center City, Kensington, and North Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, In a chamber full of Democrats, Dr. Allen would introduce herself as a "BFR—a Black Female Republican, an entity as rare as a black elephant and just as smart." However, she was a liberal Republican who supported legal abortions, was a passionate advocate of women's rights, and was a fervent champion of Black Philadelphians. She focused her policy efforts on the environment, housing, and how gangs and drugs affected the communities she loved; and

WHEREAS, During her tenure as a District City Councilmember, Dr. Allen spent much of her time out in the community. She made speeches for church groups and students, attended community and civic association meetings, and devoted three nights a week to serving the community through her medical practice; and

WHEREAS, After her first term, Dr. Allen ran again for Council, though this time for an at-large seat. In 1975, she won one of the two seats reserved for non-majority party members to become the first Black Councilwoman elected to an at-large seat of the Philadelphia City Council. She also quickly became the GOP's top vote-winner in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Allen had an explosive burgeoning political career. In 1975, *Esquire* magazine listed her as one of the nation's 12 outstanding women politicians, and in 1976, she delivered a speech at a national political convention. Finally, in 1979, she was appointed by Governor Richard Thornburgh as Pennsylvania's Secretary of the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby recognize the strength, determination, and contributions of renowned physician, Philadelphia City Councilmember, and Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Dr. Ethel Allen, whose medical expertise and dedicated public service prioritized the city's most vulnerable residents and paved the way for future generations of independent Black women in Philadelphia politics.