

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 230256)

RESOLUTION

Honoring and recognizing Joann Bell, who throughout her illustrious career, has marshaled the power of government for those who have long been excluded from political and economic power, helped to transform Philadelphia politics, and served as a skillful organizer and thought leader.

WHEREAS, Joann Bell has dedicated her life's work to the struggle for equality for women and Black and Brown Philadelphians, fighting for access to the halls of power and for an equitable economy in a system designed to prevent both; and

WHEREAS, Joann Bell was born to a working-class family, rich in love and values, who always had a seat at the dinner table for anyone that could use one; and

WHEREAS, Bell moved to Philadelphia from New York to attend Temple University after her father was transferred to the Philadelphia Navy Yard; and

WHEREAS, while a student at Temple University, Joann developed her afro-centric world view and her commitment to making change; always a voracious reader, Bell was inspired by the work of Angela Davis and closely followed her persecution and the larger attempts of government to dismantle sources of Black power; and

WHEREAS, Bell became involved in the victorious effort to defeat an amendment to the City Charter that would have permitted Frank Rizzo to serve a third consecutive term; she helped to elect Augusta Clark to City Council in 1980, only the second Black woman to ever serve on City Council; and helped to turn the tide in a city where political power was long denied to Black Philadelphians; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Temple University, Bell took a job with the City of Philadelphia, working as part of a violence-prevention effort that conducted outreach to gang members; federal funding for the program was later cut by the Nixon Administration, and Bell became a social worker for the City; and

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WHEREAS, Working as social worker, Bell started organizing her office and was soon elected shop steward by her colleagues, as she was known as someone unafraid to speak out about injustices; and

WHEREAS, Bell rose quickly through the ranks in the union, becoming a board member of her local a year after being selected as shop steward, and two years later, was elected Vice President of AFSCME District Council 47; and

WHEREAS, In her role as Vice President, Bell represented over 4,000 union members and chaired the Political Action Committee, which she used to stridently advocate for her fellow union members before candidates and elected officials, and to elect many city and state-wide officials who championed worker's rights; and

WHEREAS, Bell was not afraid to stand up against discrimination; under her leadership, District Council 47 sued on behalf of workers who were going to lose their jobs due to scores on a civil service exam which disproportionately failed Black test takers; in response to the suit, the City backed down, preserving jobs and giving the workers an important victory against discrimination; and

WHEREAS, Bell continued her fight for economic equity as a Special Assistant and Affirmative Action Officer for the City of Philadelphia under Mayor W. Wilson Goode, where she oversaw the hiring and promotion practices of all City departments, boards, and commissions and helped create the City's affirmative action policies; and

WHEREAS, Bell went on to serve as the first appointed Executive Director of the Governor's Advisory Commission on African American Affairs under Governor Robert P. Casey; as Executive Director, she led and coordinated the activities of the 25-member commission and served as an important liaison between the Governor's office and the African American community in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Under Bell's leadership, the Governor's Advisory Commission on African American Affairs became one of the Commonwealth's most effective advocates for African Americans in education, legislation, economic development, health, housing, and human services; and

WHEREAS, After helping to elect Black mayors and city officials for years, Bell and other Black women in Philadelphia were deeply concerned about the growing educational, housing, and economic disparities in Philadelphia and tired of their perspectives and policy goals being relegated the back seat—continually expected to support male leadership while being denied a place at the table of power; and

WHEREAS, In response, Bell co-founded the Black Women Leadership Council to push government to listen to and respond to the issues, concerns, and solutions of Black women in Philadelphia; and

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WHEREAS, Due to the work of the Black Women's Leadership Council, more Black women were elected to office, seated on the judicial bench, appointed to boards, commissions, and to policy-making positions in both state and local government, and the City and State began to better reflect the perspectives and ideas of Black women; and

WHEREAS, In connection with her work on Black Women's Leadership Council, Bell has led and served as a co-host for the The Source, an influential radio program and podcast through WURD devoted to current events, politics, and progressive change; and

WHEREAS, Bell has made time to give back to Philadelphia through a wide variety of public and non-profit organizations, including as a founding member of the Pennsylvania Chapter of The National Coalition of 100 Black Women, a board member of the United Way of Pennsylvania and the Women's Law Project, and Commissioner of the Delaware River Port Authority; and

WHEREAS, Throughout her life, Bell has been honored for her path breaking and impactful work, receiving the Central Pennsylvania NAACP Trailblazer Award, The Black Brain Group's Lifetime Achievement Award, The Augusta Clark Achievement Award, Women's Alliance for Job Equity Appreciation Award, and the Operation Push Award; she has been featured in Talk Magazine's Top 50 Pennsylvania Leaders, Who's Who in Pennsylvania Women, Kathryn Larson's "498 Hardworking Women of Pennsylvania," and Pennsylvania's City & State Magazine's 2022 "Fifty over Fifty;" in addition, Bell has been honored by Blacks Networking for Progress, the Coalition of 100 Black Women, and the Pittsburgh Chapter of Pennsylvania's Black Women's Council for Leadership, amongst others; and

WHEREAS, A lover of jazz, black literature and poetry, Bell is the caring mother of a son, daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, While Bell has broken barriers and worked in the highest echelons of state and local government, she has always made sure to hold the door open for others behind her and pass along her wisdom and the history of justice movements to the next era of leaders, working to develop a new generation to follow in her footsteps in creating a more equitable and just Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors and recognizes Joann Bell, who throughout her illustrious career, has marshaled the power of government for those who have long been excluded from political and economic power, helped to transform Philadelphia politics, and served as a skillful organizer and thought leader.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Joann Bell, as an expression of the admiration and respect of this legislative body.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the Thirtieth day of 2023.

Darrell L. Clarke
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Michael A. Decker
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Brooks

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Brooks, Gilmore Richardson, Gauthier,
Jones, Squilla, Vaughn, Lozada, Phillips, Thomas and Driscoll