

City of Philadelphia



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

(Resolution No. 250506)

RESOLUTION

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Stephen J. Harmelin, Esquire.

WHEREAS, Stephen J. Harmelin was born on May 7, 1939 to a Jewish family and raised in Northwest Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Harmelin graduated from Central High School and went on to attend the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated *cum laude* in 1960. After graduating from Harvard Law School in 1963, Harmelin briefly served in active duty in the United States Coast Guard; and

WHEREAS, A call from the White House to a Harvard fraternity for Harmelin would land him a position as Director of Speechwriting for President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. While serving in the White House, Harmelin was tasked by the President with creating and developing the prestigious White House Fellows program; and

WHEREAS, In 1965 Harmelin returned to his hometown of Philadelphia to begin his career as a high-powered corporate law and financial securities attorney at Dilworth Paxson LLP under former Mayor Richardson Dilworth. He stayed at the firm till his retirement in 2019, departing only briefly in 1970 to serve as a Special Assistant District Attorney under District Attorney and future U.S. Senator Arlen Specter; and

WHEREAS, Harmelin's legal work included serving as General Counsel for the Legislative Reapportionment Commission on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Senate and the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1992 following the 1990 U.S. Census. From 2007 to 2008, he worked as the receiver *ad litem* for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, recovering \$170 million, the largest in the commission's history. Harmelin also served as a member of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals Task Force to select counsel in certain lawsuits; and

WHEREAS, Harmelin was consistently chosen by a survey of his fellow lawyers to be listed in the publication, *The Best Lawyers in America*. Harmelin lectured on law firm management, corporate reorganizations, and other financial transactions for years. He served as Chairman of the Board of a New York Stock Exchange-listed company, Publicker Industries, Inc., for three

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years. In addition, he served on the Board of numerous privately held companies, including one year in which he served as an executive and as Chairman of Confab Inc., one of the Philadelphia area's largest employers; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Harmelin was also a civic champion of the City's constitutional history, helping to orchestrate Philadelphia's 1976 Bicentennial. As a trustee of the Philadelphia Constitution Foundation, he helped bring an original copy of the Magna Carta to Philadelphia in 1987 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution. The Foundation also provided guidance to the Constitutional Commission of the Russian Republic; and

WHEREAS, The Magna Carta ceremonies were attended by Queen Elizabeth's cousin Princess Alexandra and the attorneys general of the United States and Britain, and the same copy of the Magna Carta returned to Philadelphia in 2001 for a display at the newly formed Independence Visitor Center; and

WHEREAS, Harmelin was a founding board member and General Counsel of the National Constitution Center, which opened in September 2000 and owned one of the world's most extensive libraries on international Constitutions; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, Harmelin led a five year effort that located and returned to Pennsylvania its original copy of the Bill of Rights, which had been presumed lost and missing from the Commonwealth for nearly 200 years. The Bill of Rights copy was displayed at the Constitution Center between 2015 and 2017 thanks to Harmelin's efforts. He earlier worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to recover North Carolina's copy of the Bill of Rights in 2003, which had been missing for over 138 years. For his efforts, Harmelin was awarded a Certificate of Distinguished Service from the Director of the FBI; and

WHEREAS, According to National Constitution Center President Jeffrey Rosen, aside from Harmelin there is "no one else in American history who's responsible for restoring two original copies of the Bill of Rights to their owners"; and

WHEREAS, In 1989, Harmelin was appointed by Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey Sr. as a Commissioner on the Board of the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority, serving in that role until 2002. He also sat on the Board of the Barnes Foundation, where he was instrumental in relocating billions worth of paintings and sculptures to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway from the Barnes' original location in Lower Merion. He joined the board of directors of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* after Gerry Lenfest acquired the news organization in 2014, helping it become the largest nonprofit-owned newspaper in the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, Harmelin additionally served on the board of the Atlantic Legal Foundation, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and, and was Chairman of the Thomas Skelton Harrison Foundation. He was awarded the Replansky Award by the Philadelphia Bar Association Corporate Law Committee for distinguished accomplishments in civics, law and professionalism.

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On May 22, 2014, Philadelphia City Council adopted Resolution No. 140502 honoring Stephen Harmelin for his receipt of the inaugural Green Tree School & Services Lasting Legacy Award; and

WHEREAS, “He quietly built Philadelphia. He believed in his heart that Philadelphia was a world-class City,” stated Harmelin’s daughter Alison to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* about the lasting impact her father’s career, public service, and philanthropy had on the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, On May 3, 2025, Stephen Harmelin passed surrounded by family after a bout with Parkinson’s disease. He is survived by his wife of 30 years, Julia Harmelin; a son, Thomas Tracy; seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild; and

WHEREAS, Stephen J. Harmelin leaves behind a towering legacy as a local civic titan and leading curator of Center City institutions whose patronage underscores Philadelphia’s reputation as a world-class City. Philadelphia is more knowledgeable of its own constitutional history because of the tireless work of Stephen Harmelin, and the U.S. Constitution itself is a more revered document because of his advocacy; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors the life and legacy of Stephen J. Harmelin Esquire, Philadelphia’s champion of the Constitution

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to the family of Stephen J. Harmelin as evidence of the true and sincere 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

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Young

Sponsored by: Council President Johnson, Councilmembers Young, Phillips, Gilmore Richardson, Gauthier, Jones, Landau, Lozada, Thomas, Brooks, Harrity, O'Rourke, Driscoll, Bass and Ahmad