

City of Philadelphia



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

(Resolution No. 260179)

RESOLUTION

Also naming Buttonwood Street between Broad Street and N. 15th Street as “Dr. Constance E. Clayton Way.”

WHEREAS, Constance Elaine Clayton was born on October 23, 1933 in Philadelphia, the only child of Willabell Harris Clayton and Levi Clayton. She was raised by her mother and maternal grandmother, Sarah Harris; and

WHEREAS, Surrounded by a loving, tight-knit family that sought to give her a well-rounded education and development, Constance E. Clayton was engaged in the arts, local and national government, and her community. She learned the cello and the piano, was an active member of North Philadelphia’s St. Paul’s Baptist Church, and was selected to deliver a welcome address on behalf of Eleanor Roosevelt during the First Lady’s visit to Philadelphia at the age of eight; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Clayton attended Dunbar Elementary School and graduated from the Philadelphia High School for Girls, from which she would go on to attend Temple University. After receiving her B.A. and M.A. from Temple in 1955 specializing in elementary school administration, she would enter the ranks of teaching at the former William Henry Harrison School in North Philadelphia, where she taught fourth grade classes for nine years; and

WHEREAS, During this time Dr. Clayton played a critical role developing academic curricula for the School District of Philadelphia, leading to her becoming a collaborator in the School District’s Social Studies Department. She spent five years designing social studies curricula for elementary grades, then became the Project Director of the School District’s African and Afro-American Studies Program in 1969; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Clayton briefly left the School District in 1971 to serve as Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau, addressing pay inequity and supporting women’s employment in the Mid-Atlantic region. She returned to the School District as Director then Associate Superintendent of the School District’s Early Childhood Education Program from 1973 to 1983, during which time she also earned her Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University and her Ed.D. in educational administration and the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School

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of Education, where she was a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow. Under her direction, the Early Childhood Education Program grew to become a national model; and

WHEREAS, In 1983, Dr. Clayton defeated 83 other candidates to become Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, the first African American and woman to do so. She inherited a School District marred by budget setbacks, low test scores, declining enrollment, and persistently high student poverty rates. Nonetheless, Superintendent Clayton won plaudits for her visionary and innovative leadership, enhancing math and science instruction, achieving fiscal stability, implementing a long overdue capital improvements plan, as well as effectively navigating tense labor relations. Under her leadership, the School District attracted significant private sector support; and

WHEREAS, Superintendent Clayton excelled at financial management, balancing the budget and leaving the School District with a surplus by the end of her tenure. She standardized the curriculum and authored the School District's first curriculum guide for African American studies, conducting regular teacher trainings in African American studies to ensure well-informed staff and educators. She also provided significant support to district students, launching the Homeless Student Initiative, a broader sexual education program, and America 2000, a national plan for urban schools to improve student achievement by the year 2000; and

WHEREAS, Superintendent Clayton's brilliant leadership led to her appointment to numerous boards, including the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), the Private Industry Council, and the National Board of Medical Examiners. Superintendent Clayton was named a trustee of Drexel University, Widener University, and Bryn Mawr College, and was a member of the American Association of School Administrators, the Committee to Support Philadelphia Public Schools, and the Children's Defense Fund; and

WHEREAS, In 1992, she became the first African American woman to have a professorship named for her at an Ivy League institution when the University of Pennsylvania established the Constance E. Clayton Professorship in Urban Education; and

WHEREAS, Superintendent Clayton retired from her role in 1993 leaving a legacy of fiscal discipline and successful programming that boosted student achievement and inspired a generation of pupils during an era of tumult and upheaval in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, That same year, Dr. Clayton was the honoree at the annual benefit of the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum of Philadelphia, where she received recognition from then-U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley for her pioneering work on behalf of Philadelphia's schoolchildren—work that earned her the reputation as the “preeminent educator in the country”; and

WHEREAS, Her post-School District career included stints in academia as a faculty member of the School of Public Health and the Medical College of Philadelphia, and as Interim Dean of the School of Public Health at Hahnemann University; and

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WHEREAS, A lifelong patron of the arts, Dr. Clayton served on the board of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where she founded and chaired the Museum's African American Collections Committee, which worked to build the collection of African American art at the museum. An art collector herself, Dr. Clayton made historic gifts of art to both the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, and established the Clayton Fellowship to support building pipelines of African American art curators by connecting them with professional art curator organizations; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Clayton peacefully passed away on Monday, September 18, 2023, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of service to the City of Philadelphia that saw her receive numerous awards and 17 honorary doctorates, as well as constant recognition from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and the Pennsylvania Senate. It is fitting and proper that the Council acknowledge a towering figure in Philadelphia who devoted her life to improving educational opportunities for children; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Buttonwood Street between Broad Street and N. 15th Street shall be also named as "Dr. Constance E. Clayton Way."

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to the family of Dr. Constance E. Clayton 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 twelfth day of March, 2026.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Young

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