



City of Philadelphia

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

RESOLUTION NO. 220594

Introduced June 9, 2022

Councilmember Gauthier

RESOLUTION

Honoring the life and legacy of trailblazing attorney Bernard Lee for his contributions to the practice of law, and his dedication to mentorship, family, and friends.

WHEREAS, Bernard Lee was born on August 26, 1950 and grew up in Southwest Philadelphia and from a young age, demonstrated a commitment to, law and justice; and

WHEREAS, He demonstrated this commitment by partnering with friends to integrate the neighborhood pool at James Finnegan Playground during a time of economic hardship and racial segregation. In 1966, he traveled to Harrisburg with Mayor, Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode to advocate for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. At the same time, he starred on the John Bartram High School football team; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Bartram High School in 1968, he attended Lake Forest College on a full scholarship, graduating as president of his class; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Lake Forest, Bernard attended the University of Pennsylvania Law School, graduating in 1977. A distinguished student, he served as one of the Law School's first African American legal writing instructors. At Penn, he met his future wife, Kathleen, with whom Bernard remained happily married for 47 years until his passing, and

WHEREAS, After law school, Bernard joined the real estate practice at the powerhouse Philadelphia law firm Wolf Block, later becoming the first African American Vice-Chairman at the firm. After Wolf Block disbanded, he joined the real estate group at Cozen O'Connor where he chaired the group and served as a shareholder; and

WHEREAS, Bernard's legal prowess was well known. He earned the respect of his colleagues, adversaries and clients with his wit, sharp thinking skills and calm demeanor. As a result, he was called to work on many significant transactions including One Liberty Place, Comcast Tower, Lincoln Financial Field and Sharon Baptist Church; and

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WHEREAS, Bernard was widely recognized as a top lawyer, receiving a litany of awards over the course of his career. Most recently, he received the Legal Intelligencer 2020 Professional Excellence Award, given to attorneys from all corners of the legal profession including jurists, and office holders who left an imprint on the legal history of the state during their career; and

WHEREAS, Bernard also served on the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and was active in many bar associations and affinity groups. He served on the Executive Board of the Real Property Section of the Philadelphia Bar Association, as former president of the Barristers' Association of Philadelphia and as legal counsel to the Philadelphia Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, While Bernard's professional accomplishments are extraordinary and memorable, he will be remembered most for his love for his family and friends, and his positive impact on lawyers with whom he interacted and mentored; and

WHEREAS, Bernard's ascension to the top of the legal field served as a shining example of what was possible for young Black lawyers in the historically white-dominated profession. He chose to share his legal gifts and life experiences with any young lawyer who approached him, but especially young lawyers of color; and

WHEREAS, Bernard's mentorship was real and long-term, not just a one and done conversation. Despite his credentials and success, Bernard was a model of humility and kindness, setting a great example for young lawyers to follow. His humble spirit and ideals will live-on in the practice of law through the countless lawyers he mentored, and the countless lawyers his mentees will go-on to mentor; and

WHEREAS, Bernard was revered not just by young lawyers, but also by his peers. It was common to walk by his office and see a lawyer plopped in one of the comfy chairs in front of his desk seeking advice on a complex matter, simply catching-up or debating coaching and managerial decisions in Philly sports; and

WHEREAS, Bernard had a unique ability to give much of himself in all facets of life, especially to his wife and kids. He faithfully attended his kids' sporting events and plays, never missed milestones and supported his loving wife Kathleen in her career. Bernard had a joy for life and a smile that lit up the room. This was most evident when he was talking about Philly sports, his kids (and young grandson) or travel with his wife; and

WHEREAS, It is impossible to capture the full essence of Bernard Lee in writing. Those who knew him will miss his playful smile, his jokes, his advice, his counsel, his generosity of spirit and much more; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors and recognizes the life and legacy of trailblazing attorney Bernard Lee for his contributions to the practice of law, and his dedication to mentorship, family and friends.

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FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Bernard Lee, further evidencing the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.

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