

Legislation Text

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Celebrating and remembering United States Coast Guard hero and National Football League Legend Emlen Tunnell on the occasion of the United States Coast Guard ship and building dedications in his honor.

WHEREAS, Emlen Tunnell was known as “Mr. Defense” when he was playing for Hall of Fame coach Vince Lombardi in the National Football League (NFL), but he was known as a hero because of his service in the United States Coast Guard; and

WHEREAS, Emlen Tunnell, a Bryn Mawr native, joined the United States Coast Guard in May 1943 during World War II, determined to serve his country despite suffering a broken neck playing football at the University of Toledo the year prior; and

WHEREAS, As one of only 5 Black crew members onboard the United States Coast Guard cargo ship USS Etamin stationed at Aitape Harbor, Papua New Guinea, Emlen earned the recognition and respect of his fellow crewmembers and commanders when he ran onto the ship after it was attacked to rescue and save another crewmember from a fire; and

WHEREAS, Two years after his first act of heroism, Emlen would rescue another crewmember who fell overboard, this time on the USS Tampa, by jumping into the frigid waters and saving his fellow crewmember’s life without regard for his own; and

WHEREAS, After his second act of heroism, the commanding officer of the USS Tampa nominated Emlen for the Silver Lifesaving Medal. At the time, Black servicemembers were rarely nominated or rewarded any medals; and

WHEREAS, In 1946, Emlen was discharged from the United States Coast Guard and would spend the next two years returning to football, this time for the University of Iowa; and

WHEREAS, After proving he was still capable of playing football at an elite level, Emlen became the first Black player signed by the NFL’s New York Giants in 1948; and

WHEREAS, Despite the racism and hatred Emlen experienced by fans at home and on the road, Emlen would silence the opposition and earn new supporters with his rugged defense and unrelenting effort on the field; and

WHEREAS, Emlen retired from the NFL in March 1962, holding numerous NFL statistical records at the time for most career interceptions, interception return yards, punt returns, and punt return yards; and

WHEREAS, In 1967, Emlen became the first Black player and the first defensive player to be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. His NFL career accolades include: 2 NFL championships, 9 Pro Bowl selections, and 6 First Team All-Pro selections; and

WHEREAS, Emlen is regarded as one of the greatest players in NFL history, named to the NFL’s 1950’s All-

Decade Team, ranked number 70 on the Sporting News' list of 100 Greatest Football Players, and he was one of only 22 players included in the New York Giants Ring of Honor at MetLife Stadium; and

WHEREAS, Emlen reflected on his life in his memoir titled, "Footsteps of a Giant," which offered a reflection on his own life and valuable lessons for those in the generations that followed; and

WHEREAS, Emlen Tunnell passed away on July 23, 1975, but his legacy and story continue to inspire many to persevere and challenge themselves despite the odds faced. Emlen never received the Silver Lifesaving Medal during his life, but his heroism was indisputable; and

WHEREAS, In 2011, the United States Coast Guard posthumously awarded Emlen Tunnell the Silver Lifesaving Medal. The United States Coast Guard will also be commissioning a new United States Coast Guard Cutter in his honor as the "USCGC Emlen Tunnell," and a brand new athletic center on the United States Coast Guard Academy campus to be named "The Emlen Tunnell Strength and Conditioning Center"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby celebrate and honor United States Coast Guard hero and National Football League Legend Emlen Tunnell on the occasion of the United States Coast Guard ship and building dedications in his honor.