

Legislation Text

File #: 220607, **Version:** 0

Adding Thurgood M. Matthews, Esq. to the street signs on the 1000 block of Cheltenham Avenue in honor of his fierce advocacy on behalf of his clients, leadership in the courtroom, investment in his local community, and service to the people of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Thurgood M. Matthews was born on August 1, 1955, to Willie C. Matthews and Hannah Matthews, in Coatesville, PA. Affectionately known as Thur, Good, T-Good, T-Bone, T, and Eagle One by this family and friends, he was the third of four children and was named after Supreme Court Justice and Civil Rights activist, Thurgood Marshall; and

WHEREAS, A 1973 graduate of Coatesville High School, Thurgood was a member of the school's student council, track team, and drama club. There, he developed a love for public speaking - entering and winning oral contests. Thurgood continued his formal education at Allegheny College in Meadville, PA, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science in 1977 and gaining notoriety as one of the disc jockeys on the campus radio station, WARC 90.3 FM. His love for music and flare for engaging commentary made his segment one of the most popular on the air. It was also at Allegheny College where he met the love of his life, future wife, and mother of his children, Sheila D. Jeter; and

WHEREAS, After receiving his degree, Thurgood returned to Coatesville to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company as a manager and to also help his parents on the family farm. Ever the scholar and also wanting to fully step into the footsteps of his namesake, Thurgood attended Howard University School of Law from 1978 to 1981. While at Howard, he shined as a student and harnessed the legal acumen that would serve him throughout his illustrious career. Despite having multiple offers to pursue corporate opportunities upon graduation, he knew early on that he wanted to dedicate his career to public service; and

WHEREAS, Upon graduating in 1981, Thurgood became a member of the Pennsylvania Bar. He was a career Defender, working in both the Federal Community Defender for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and the Defender Association of Philadelphia offices. He spent the majority of his career at the Defender Association of Philadelphia, where he rose up in the ranks and served as the Assistant Chief of the Special Defense Unit. He was celebrated by colleagues and clients as being an impeccable trial attorney, whose skills, intelligence, and keen advocacy were second to none. He was a lion in the courtroom - fearless, methodical, and captivating. Thurgood was a phenomenal storyteller and would fascinate judges and jurors alike with his ability to weave together complex case theories, accented by his wit, charm, and commanding presence. He believed that every criminal defendant deserved zealous advocacy, and in his near-40 years as a trial attorney, he never once shrank from that charge; and

WHEREAS, In 1986, Thurgood and Sheila married and began growing their family in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. In 1990, Thurgood, Sheila and their three daughters, Keisha, Therilia, and Brittany, settled into the East Oak Lane neighborhood. Later, they welcomed a baby boy, Thurgood Jr., to complete their family of six. Thurgood was an active member of the East Oak Lane community. He served on the Oak Lane Community Action Association (OLCAA) board, was a member of the community Town Watch, and was a Scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 19 - helping to guide over ten African American boys to Eagle Scout. He was also an assistant

coach for his children's softball and baseball teams; and

WHEREAS, A true renaissance man, Thurgood could build or fix just about anything. He loved working in his yard, gardening, repairing his cars, and barbecuing. On weekends, you could often find him holding court with neighbors and friends who would stop by. Thurgood was known for his wisdom and humor. Thurgood loved music, and rare was the occasion old school jams weren't playing. He was an avid reader, and he had an impeccable memory. It often seemed as though he knew something about everything. He was a loyal friend, and was always ready to lend a helping hand; and

WHEREAS, In 2002, Thurgood became a single father after the passing of his beloved wife, Sheila. He remained committed to his community and career, while also balancing the responsibility of raising their four children. He loved his children immensely, and was a doting father and later, grandfather; and

WHEREAS, In 2016, Thurgood was honored by the Barristers' Association of Philadelphia, Inc., with the Cecil B. Moore Award for his selfless service to the Black community. Not only was Thurgood an excellent attorney, but he was also a masterful teacher. He took great pride in mentoring and developing young trial attorneys. Many of those who benefited from his tutelage have gone on to be accomplished attorneys, judges, civic leaders, and fierce advocates for change; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, as Thurgood began to prepare for his retirement from the Defenders Association of Philadelphia, he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He approached his cancer diagnosis like he approached every other challenge; with fearlessness, tenacity, and a strong faith in the Lord. Like so many of his battles, he was once again defying the odds. After a valiant 19-month fight, on November 20, 2020, in Philadelphia, Thurgood was called home to heaven's glory; and

WHEREAS, On March 18, 2021, Thurgood was posthumously honored by the Defender Association of Philadelphia in a ceremony where the office training center was named after him. He was also posthumously recognized by the Philadelphia Bar Association on December 9, 2021, when he was awarded the prestigious Thurgood Marshall Award for his exemplary service to the legal profession; and

WHEREAS, Thurgood was preceded in death by his wife, Sheila D. Matthews. He is deeply and lovingly missed by his daughters, Keisha K. Matthews, Therilia H.T. Matthews (Christopher) and Brittany M. Stalworth (Darnell); sons, Thurgood M. Matthews, II and William M. Matthews (Debra); his darling grand-daughter, Daphne M. Stalworth; his beloved siblings, Diane Bradley (Albert), Will Matthews (Linda); mother-in-law, Thelma Jeter; siblings-in-law, Runako Jeter, Kathy Jeter, James Jeter Sr. (Arleen), Kevin Jeter, Karen Griffith, and Renee Edmonds; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, dear friends, mentees, and the Oak Lane community; and

WHEREAS, Thurgood is fondly remembered and admired by friends and family as a devoted Christian, husband, father, brother, and mentor. His passion for family, advocacy and community will live on eternally through his legacy, and his influence on the Philadelphia legal community will continue to impact generations to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby adds Thurgood M. Matthews, Esq. to the street signs on the 1000 block of Cheltenham Avenue in honor of his fierce advocacy on behalf of his clients, leadership in the courtroom, investment in his local community, and service to the people of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Thurgood M. Matthews, Esq. as a sincere expression of the Philadelphia City Council's respect, gratitude, and recognition.