

Legislation Text

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Honoring Philadelphia playwright, actor, director, and educator James Ijames, whose play “Fat Ham” was named the 2022 Pulitzer Prize winner for best drama, and whose work has brought a brilliant, joyful, and poignant voice for Black and queer America to the stage.

WHEREAS, James Ijames grew up in North Carolina, the middle son in a large multigenerational family with many teachers and educators, including a mother who worked in the school system. Ijames attended Morehouse College and received an MFA in acting from Temple University; and

WHEREAS, Ijames fell in love with the dramatic form early, starting to write skits in his teenage years before going on to act, direct, and write plays for audiences nationwide; and

WHEREAS, James Ijames’ work has been produced and shown at theaters across the country and in Philadelphia, including the National Black Theatre, Azuka Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre, Flashpoint Theater Company, The Philadelphia Theatre Company, and the Wilma Theater; and

WHEREAS, James Ijames is a multi-award-winning artist who has received prestigious awards for his acting, his directing, and his writing, including the 2011 F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Artist, two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor, two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Direction of a Play and the Terrance McNally New Play Award; and

WHEREAS, Ijames won the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Drama for his play, “Fat Ham”, which the Pulitzer Board acclaimed as a “funny, poignant play that deftly transposes ‘Hamlet’ to a family barbecue in the American South to grapple with questions of identity, kinship, responsibility, and honesty”; and

WHEREAS, “Fat Ham” revolves around Juicy, who is a sensitive and self-aware young Black man trying to break the cycles of trauma and violence in service of his own liberation. According to Ijames, the play demonstrates what the “Hamlet” narrative would look like if it were queered, infiltrated, and taken over by people of color; and

WHEREAS, In his work, Ijames considers the journey from pain to pleasure, cycles of violence; exuberance, family, and transformation, while documenting people who, despite their trauma and pain, are abundant with life and possibility; and

WHEREAS, In Philadelphia, Ijames, has been a leader and a teacher. He is a founding member of Orbiter 3, Philadelphia’s first playwright-producing collective, an associate professor of Theatre at Villanova University, a co-artistic director of the Wilma Theater, and a resident of South Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Ijames and his body of work have given so much joy, perspective, meaning, and inspiration to Philadelphia and the Black and queer community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors Philadelphia playwright,

actor, director, and educator James Ijames, whose play “Fat Ham” was named the 2022 Pulitzer Prize winner for best drama and whose work has brought a brilliant, joyful, and poignant voice for Black and queer America to the stage.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy be presented to James Ijames, further evidencing the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.