

Legislation Text

File #: 161032, **Version:** 0

Honoring and recognizing the heart-driven, impactful and life-changing career of Judith Bernstein-Baker in service to Philadelphia's vibrant community of immigrants and refugees.

WHEREAS, Judith Bernstein-Baker, born to Jewish immigrants from Poland, and raised among Latino and Asian seamstresses in New York, has devoted every waking moment of her career to welcoming strangers facing exclusion and genocide into the fabric of our community, and to ensuring these new neighbors full access to everything our diverse and vibrant neighborhoods have to offer; and

WHEREAS, Judi's eighteen years of service to HIAS Pennsylvania have been deeply personal; per the Jewish value of *welcoming the stranger*, HIAS is the nation's oldest international migration and refugee resettlement agency, providing legal and supportive services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to assure their fair treatment and full integration into American society; and

WHEREAS, Since joining HIAS Pennsylvania as Executive Director in 1998, Judi has led the non-profit to triple in size and expand its services to provide legal, social, and resettlement services to low-income Philadelphians who seek political asylum, citizenship, and relief from deportation; and

WHEREAS, During Judi's tenure, HIAS Pennsylvania has relocated refugees fleeing violence in Central America and West Africa; secured temporary protective status to Haitians after the 2010 earthquake; helped clients obtain special visas for refuge from domestic abuse; and became the region's largest provider of free immigration services to unaccompanied, abused, and neglected minors; and

WHEREAS, Since the day Judi first arrived in the City of Brotherly Love-to attend the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Social Work and Temple University's Beasley School of Law-she has helped grow the City of Philadelphia's international reputation for welcoming, supporting, and embracing members of our society who have fled oppression, violence, and even torture; and

WHEREAS, Judi's tireless outreach and advocacy has influenced the preservation and expansion of immigrant rights not only by the City of Philadelphia, but also by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In 2003, Judi courageously established the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Citizenship Coalition, our first and only state-wide immigrant advocacy organization. Most famously, Judi halted PennDOT's proposed cancellation of thousands of licenses for immigrants and refugees in need; and

WHEREAS, Judi Bernstein-Baker is a living legend in Philadelphia's public interest community. She was the first staff attorney at the Support Center for Child Advocates, the nation's oldest and largest pro bono program for abused and neglected children. She founded and directed the Penn Law Public Service Program-the first of its kind in an Ivy League school. She enlisted and trained hundreds of attorneys and laws students in order to assist applicants for citizenship. She co-wrote *Understanding Immigration Law and Practice*, a guide for the next generation of practitioners to protect immigrants and refugees to the fullest extent of our laws. And she continues to advocate, tirelessly and without pause, for all Philadelphians' right to legal counsel to secure basic

everyday needs; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the Philadelphia Bar Foundation Award, originally known as the Apothaker Award, was presented to Judi Bernstein-Baker, for exemplifying the highest ideals of public interest law and exceptional service to the legal services community; and

WHEREAS, Judi's career is perhaps, most of all, marked by her unwavering dedication to her staff and colleagues throughout Philadelphia's public interest community. Best put by Reggie Shuford, Executive Director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania: "Judi always took the time to offer an encouraging word of support, to attend an event, or to send a congratulatory message. It is her warmth, compassion, empathy and genuine interest in others that made her so effective as an advocate for social justice. We will miss her among the ranks of executive directors of non-profit legal service organizations, but we are comforted to know she is just a phone call away"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Council of the City of Philadelphia honors and recognizes Judith Bernstein-Baker upon her retirement from HIAS Pennsylvania and a life-long career in support and embrace of our most vulnerable neighbors.