



City of Philadelphia

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

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring Judge Doris Smith-Ribner for her years of service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as the first Black woman elected to a statewide judicial seat on the occasion of Women's History Month.

WHEREAS, Doris Smith-Ribner was born and raised in Cleveland before coming to Pennsylvania to further her education, earning a Bachelor's degree in economics and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Pittsburgh; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner planned to return to Ohio after graduation, but remained in Pennsylvania at the urging of a colleague and mentor, K. Leroy Irvis; and

WHEREAS, The two were colleagues at a law firm in Pittsburgh while Smith-Ribner was still in college; Irvis would later become the first Black Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner established a successful career in private practice in Allegheny County and served as the solicitor for the Allegheny County Controller; and

WHEREAS, Her legal prowess led Governor Dick Thornburgh to nominate her to a vacancy on the Common Pleas Court in Allegheny County; and

WHEREAS, After the appointment expired, Smith-Ribner decided to run for a full ten-year term on the bench; and

WHEREAS, Though her first attempt was unsuccessful, Smith-Ribner persevered and two years later in 1987 was elected to the statewide Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner's historic victory marked the first time a Black woman was elected to a statewide judicial seat in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner was reelected to the bench in 1997 and 2007; she retired in 2009; and

WHEREAS, In addition to her service as Judge, Smith-Ribner served in various capacities at the local, state, and federal levels; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner was instrumental in desegregation cases involving the Philadelphia School District from 1993 to 2009; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner's findings and court orders secured full-day kindergarten for all eligible children attending Philadelphia public schools and required the school district to carry out recommendations from education experts and to institute education reforms; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner served on the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission under two governors, and, in 2014, was appointed by the President to the White House Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner today serves on the Board of Visitors at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and Board of Trustees at Lincoln University; and

WHEREAS, This year, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is set to become the first Black woman appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Brown Jackson's historic achievement is a reminder of the countless trailblazers like Judge Smith-Ribner who have persevered and succeeded in spite of many barriers; and

WHEREAS, Smith-Ribner's distinguished career and ongoing service is an inspiration to future public servants; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby recognizes and honors Judge Doris Smith-Ribner for her years of service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as the first Black woman elected to a statewide judicial seat on the occasion of Women's History Month.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy be presented to Judge Doris Smith-Ribner, further evidencing the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.