

## Legislation Text

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Renaming the 6600 Block of Germantown Avenue “J. Whyatt Mondesire Way” to recognize, honor, and celebrate the life and legacy of J. Whyatt “Jerry” Mondesire for his dedication to social justice and political empowerment of black and brown communities in the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, J. Whyatt “Jerry” Mondesire was born in Harlem, New York City on October 14, 1949 to mother Winnifred Taylor and father Jerome Alexis Mondesire. He was the youngest of four children. From his father, a follower of Marcus Garvey, Jerry learned about politics and activism. He learned the ethics of hard work at an early age often describing how his mother worked as a domestic worker and held a job as a seamstress to make ends meet. Sadly, she died when Jerry was very young, making his life unstable. He moved around to live with many different relatives and friends as he finished junior high and high school; and

WHEREAS, Jerry went on to attend the City College of New York where he studied journalism and also where he took on major role as one of the organizers of the college’s historic takeover in 1969. He was also instrumental in establishing and publishing what became officially known as “*The Paper*” that is still in circulation today. As it was noted during a celebration of the 33rd Anniversary, “the diversity and opportunity enjoyed by current City College students is a direct result of these revolutionary actions”; and

WHEREAS, After college Jerry became a reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* where he covered the infamous Black October killings of a Maryland State Senator in 1973. His distinguished work caught the attention of many newspapers around the country and in 1974 he accepted a staff position at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* where he covered politics. He became the assistant city desk editor at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the first African American to hold that position, but in 1977 Jerry decided to enter politics fulltime. He left the newspaper and joined the staff of a young Congressman William H. Gray; and

WHEREAS, As a top aide to then Congressman William H. Gray, Jerry took on all shapes and sizes of issues from voting rights to South African sanctions. One of his fondest memories while working with Congressman Gray, was meeting South African President, Nelson Mandela. After the retirement of Congressman Gray, he worked briefly with the United Negro College Fund before starting the *Philadelphia Sunday Sun*, which continues to provide a news source of information for the African American Community. Jerry also developed TV and radio programs called “Freedom Quest” which focused on local current events concerning minorities in the Greater Philadelphia Area; and

WHEREAS, In 1997, Jerry was inaugurated as the President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the NAACP. During his tenure, he also became State President of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the NAACP, along with serving on its National Board. His accomplishments as President of both the Philadelphia and State Chapter of the NAACP, include helping to pass laws that gave ex-offenders the right to vote in Pennsylvania, and tackling diverse issues from Pennsylvania’s voter ID law to improving public schools; and

WHEREAS, Jerry was amongst the founders and early members of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. He was a champion for equal rights and had a lasting impact on the City of Philadelphia by developing many of the City’s young leaders and journalists. He charged many to be bold in their leadership

and was fearless while speaking truth to power; and

WHEREAS, Jerry was one of the most talented and skillful journalists. He was someone who made a difference in the lives of people. He fought for all people of color by challenging the status quo to ensure that all people in the City of Philadelphia be treated justly; and

WHEREAS, We in this Council, join in recognizing and honoring the life and legacy of J. Wyatt “Jerry” Mondesire and hope that the renaming of the 6600 Block of Germantown Avenue, will keep his memory alive, as a reminder of his service and dedication to the City of Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the 6600 Block of Germantown Avenue is also named “J. Wyatt Mondesire Way”.