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Title:	Celebrating and honoring the life and legacy of Ntozake Shange, the African American feminist, poet, and playwright				
Sponsors:	Councilmember Parker, Councilmember Reynolds Brown, Councilmember Green, Councilmember Domb, Councilmember Gym, Councilmember Blackwell, Councilmember Taubenberger, Councilmember Bass, Council President Clarke, Councilmember Oh, Councilmember Greenlee, Councilmember Johnson, Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Henon, Councilmember O'Neill, Councilmember Quiñones Sánchez				
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11/1/2018	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed on This Week's Final Passage Calendar	Pass	
11/1/2018	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		

Celebrating and honoring the life and legacy of Ntozake Shange, the African American feminist, poet, and playwright

WHEREAS, Ntozake Shange was born Paulette Linda Williams, the oldest of four children, in Trenton, N.J., on Oct. 18, 1948. Her father was a surgeon and her mother was a psychiatric social worker; both were politically active and mixed with a crowd that included musicians Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie, as well as writer W.E.B. Du Bois; and

WHEREAS, When she was eight years old, Shange's family moved to the racially segregated city of St. Louis, MO. Because of the *Brown v. Board of Education* court decision, Shange was bused to a white school where she endured racism and racist attacks; and

WHEREAS, When Shange was 13, her family returned to Lawrence Township, N.J., where she graduated from Lawrence High School. In 1966, Shange enrolled at Barnard College in New York City. Shange graduated cum laude in American Studies, then earned a Master's Degree in the same field from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1973; and

WHEREAS, During her first year of college, she married, but the marriage did not last long. Depressed over her separation and with a strong sense of bitterness and alienation, she attempted suicide; and

WHEREAS, In 1971, having come to terms with her depression and alienation, she adopted a Zulu name, selecting Ntozake, which means “she who comes with her own things,” and Shange, meaning “one who walks like a lion”; and

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WHEREAS, In 1975, Shange moved back to New York City and became a founding poet of the Nuyorican Poets Café. In that same year, her first and most well-known play was produced - *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*; and

WHEREAS, The play was a 20-part "choreopoem" - a term Shange coined to describe her groundbreaking dramatic form, combining of poetry, dance, music, and song that chronicled the lives of women of color in the United States. Its characters were referred to only by the colors they wore on stage - red, blue, purple, yellow, brown, green, and orange - and recited monologues in verse, discussing abortions, failed relationships, lost children, and squandered lives; and

WHEREAS, The production drew the attention of Woodie King, Jr., a producer who helped polish the verses into a play. It received an Obie Award and a Tony Award nomination for best play. For the first three weeks on Broadway, it featured Shange as the Lady in Orange. The play was adapted into a 2010 movie by director Tyler Perry, starring Thandie Newton, Anika Noni Rose, Kerry Washington and Janet Jackson; and

WHEREAS, *The New York Times* theater critic Clive Barnes, wrote about the play, "Black sisterhood. That is what Ntozake Shange's totally extraordinary and wonderful evening…is all about. It has those insights into life and living that make the theater such an incredible marketplace for the soul. And simply because it is about black women - not just blacks and not just women - it is a very humbling but inspiring thing for a white man to experience"; and

WHEREAS, The play "rocked the socio/cultural moment," said writer Marita Golden, who co-founded the Hurston/Wright Foundation, a resource center for black writers that honored Shange with its career achievement award one week before her death; and

WHEREAS, Shange's friend Thulani Davis, a writer and African American studies scholar who helped Shange assemble and order the play's monologues, said of the play, "These scenes were familiar to the audience. She opened up something that women could experience suddenly, collectively, in the theater. Suddenly, there's a room full of people that understand what you haven't ever told anybody about some trauma that you've experienced"; and

WHEREAS, In the aftermath of "For Colored Girls," Shange continued to write, churning out theatrical works that included "Spell No. 7," (1979), which featured black actors discussing the indignities of working in a white -dominated industry, and "Lost in Language and Sound: Or How I Found My Way to the Arts" (2013), an autobiographical piece she described as a "choreoessay"; and

WHEREAS, In nearly 50 plays, novels, children's books, and poetry and essay collections, Shange went on to establish herself as one of the most distinctive voices in American letters, a stylistic innovator who blended forms and genres to address themes of women's empowerment, racial inequality, domestic abuse, abandonment and self-respect; and

WHEREAS, Shange worked with a number of black theater companies and taught at universities including Brown, Rice, Villanova, and DePaul. She also received a Guggenheim Fellowship as well as honors including a Pushcart Prize. In interviews, Shange often said that she sought to build a legacy in which black culture was memorialized and preserved; and

WHEREAS, Shange passed away on October 27, 2018, age 70, in an assisted living facility in Bowie, Maryland. She had been ill, having suffered a series of strokes in 2004, but continued to work until the end; and

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WHEREAS, Shange is survived by her daughter Savannah Shange, an anthropology professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz; two sisters; a brother; and a granddaughter; and

WHEREAS, Shange's work, particularly "For Colored Girls," is seen as a rite of passage for many black women. As Shange herself once said, "I write for young girls of color, for girls who don't even exist yet, so that there is something there for them when they arrive"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby celebrates and honors the life and legacy of Ntozake Shange, the African American feminist, poet, and playwright.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family, friends, and colleagues of Ntozake Shange as a sincere expression of the Council of the City of Philadelphia's admiration and recognition.

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