



Legislation Text

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Celebrating and honoring the life and accomplishments of Dr. Maya Angelou. A treasurer of American Culture, Dr. Angelou was world renowned for her work as an actress, singer, dancer, film director, essayist, inaugural poet, and Pulitzer-Prize nominated poet. The author of more than 35 books, a dozen volumes of poetry and countless essays, Dr. Angelou passed away on Wednesday, May 28th at her home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina where she had a lifetime appointment at Wake Forest University. Dr. Angelou is survived by her son, Guy B. Johnson along with her two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

WHEREAS, Born Marguerite Annie Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Dr. Angelou moved to Stamps, Arkansas at the age of 3, a town so segregated that Dr. Angelou once remarked, "most black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like"; and

WHEREAS, Sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend at the age of 8, Dr. Angelou remained mute for the next five years. Only after meeting a local woman named Bertha Flowers did Dr. Angelou emerge from her shell, and begin devouring poems by authors such as William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Paul Laurence Dunbar; and

WHEREAS, Giving birth to her son Clyde Bailey Johnson at the age of 16, Dr. Angelou often worked odd jobs to make ends meet including a shake dancer in nightclubs, a fry cook in a hamburger restaurant, dinner cook in a Creole restaurant, and a job in a mechanic's shop where she stripped paint off cars by hand; and

WHEREAS, In the late 1950s, Dr. Angelou moved to New York and joined the Harlem Writers Guild where she had the opportunity to work and collaborate with the novelist-playwright James Baldwin; and

WHEREAS, In the 1960s, Dr. Angelou joined the civil rights movement helping co-produce a benefit cabaret for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a group co-founded by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. Angelou continued her work in the civil rights movement by helping plan King's Poor People's Campaign in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on Dr. Angelou's 40th birthday; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou's 1969 novel, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", was hailed by critics as an autobiography that truly captured the black experience. This novel paved the way for the success of future black feminist writers including Toni Morrison, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker and Toni Cade Bambara; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Angelou became the first African American woman to have an original screenplay produced ("Georgia, Georgia," 1972) and direct a major feature film (Down in the Delta, 1998); and

WHEREAS, Angelou's poem "Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie" was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; and

WHEREAS, In 1993, Dr. Angelou wrote and read "On the Pulse of Morning" for President William Jefferson

Clinton's Inauguration, an honor that only two poets prior had ever been offered; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, Dr. Angelou was the recipient of Philadelphia's own Marian Anderson Award. The Marian Anderson Award honors critically acclaimed artists who have impacted society in a positive way, either through their work or their support for an important cause. Created in 1998, the Award is named for the great Philadelphian and American artist; and

WHEREAS, In 2011, Dr. Angelou received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama which recognizes those individuals who have made an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors; and

WHEREAS, "You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Pursue the things you love doing and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off of you." - Dr. Maya Angelou; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby celebrate and honor the tremendous life and accomplishments of Dr. Maya Angelou.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Guy B. Johnson as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.