



Legislation Text

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Honoring the African American Children's Book Project on the Occasion of its 27th Annual African American Children's Book Fair.

WHEREAS, Philadelphia struggles with a double-digit illiteracy rate among those 16 and older, underscoring the importance of providing children with early opportunities to learn to read, and beyond that, to develop a love for reading; and

WHEREAS, Studies show that children who read outside of school coursework tend to excel in other aspects of their lives. Book fairs provide children with a venue to explore their curiosity and interests, and motivates children to read by offering them a wide selection of different books to browse; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia is home to a diverse community of writers, representing varied cultures, backgrounds, and experiences that match those of the City's residents; and

WHEREAS, The African American Children's Book Fair is one of the oldest and largest single-day events for African American children's books in the country, with an average annual attendance of over 3,500 children, parents, and friends. Rich or poor, no one leaves empty-handed, as the books themselves are priced at a level where they are more affordable, and posters, bookmarkers, and raffle books are distributed free of charge to attendees; and

WHEREAS, The book fair highlights books that enlighten and empower children, and features some of the most exciting children's authors from the multicultural literary community. Its goal is not merely to get children reading, but to foster in them a lifelong passion for the activity that enriches their lives. The event is a product of the African American Children's Book Project; and

WHEREAS, Vannese Lloyd Sgambati is the founder and CEO of the African American Children's Book Project. As a literary consultant, she is a much sought-after expert on trends in diverse books and how to incorporate these books into homes, schools and libraries. She created the Book Fair because she believes that all children should have access to books that reflect their images. With the Book Fair in its 27th year, it is clear that Sgambati's vision has resonated within the Philadelphia community; and

WHEREAS, This year's Book Fair will have over 36 authors and illustrators in attendance and will specially feature two celebrated authors: Susan Robeson and T.R. Simon; and

WHEREAS, One of this year's two featured authors is Susan Robeson, who will highlight her new book, *Grandpa Stops a War*. Robeson, the granddaughter of renowned American musician, actor, and activist Paul Robeson, is an award-winning documentary film and television producer, an adjunct professor in film and communications, and the executive director of the Paul Robeson Foundation; and

WHEREAS, *Grandpa Stops a War* is based on the true story of Paul Robeson's visit to the front lines of the Spanish Civil War to sing to soldiers. Illustrated by Rod Brown, *Grandpa Stops a War* is Susan Robeson's first

picture book for young readers; and

WHEREAS, Living in London with his family during the time of the Spanish Civil War, Paul Robeson became disturbed by reports of the struggles suffered by those affected by the conflict and collected money, food, and clothing for Spanish children. Robeson eventually decided to visit the front, where he sang African American spirituals and songs of freedom with such feeling that soldiers on both sides were moved. As Susan Robeson writes in *Grandpa Stops a War*, “While Grandpa Paul sang, there was peace”; and

WHEREAS, Renowned children’s author T.R. Simon will be featured at the Book Fair. Most recently, Simon authored *Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground*, which has received starred reviews from numerous publications and is a Junior Library Guild selection; and

WHEREAS, *Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground* continues the fictionalized account of Zora Neale Hurston’s childhood adventures that Simon began in her first book, *Zora and Me*. Co-authored with Victoria Bond, *Zora and Me* won the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent and was nominated for an Edgar Award for best mystery in the category of Juvenile Fiction; and

WHEREAS, In *Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground*, young Zora and her friend Carrie Brown come across their friend Mr. Polk injured outside his cabin. Zora and Carrie soon find themselves embroiled in a decades-old mystery involving an enslaved girl named Lucia. In the words of Kirkus Reviews, *Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground* is an “extraordinary, richly imagined coming-of-age story about a young Zora Neale Hurston, the long, cruel reach of slavery, and the power of community.”; and

WHEREAS, Two additional individuals will be honored for their extraordinary support of children’s literacy in Philadelphia; they are Angela Foreshaw-Rouse and Grace Rustia of the AARP Pennsylvania Office; and

WHEREAS, Angela Foreshaw-Roude is the Manager of State Operations and Community Outreach for AARP Pennsylvania. There, she oversees the implementation of state and national campaigns, volunteer and member engagement, and community outreach throughout Pennsylvania. Her work in communications outreach has been recognized by elected officials and community leaders while educating the 50+ population and AARP’s 1.8 million members in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Grace Rustia is the Associate State Director for Multicultural Outreach for AARP Pennsylvania. She is an accomplished advocate for multicultural and diverse communities with years of experience in public affairs, community development and management. Grace also holds an appointed seat as the Vice Chair of the Mayor’s Commission on Asian American Affairs, for which she serves as an advisor on issues and policies pertinent to Asian communities in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 African American Children’s Book Fair will take place on Saturday, February 2 at the Community College of Philadelphia, from 1PM to 4 PM. This year’s event is produced by the Literary Media and Publishing Consultants; and

WHEREAS, Council has no doubt that this year’s iteration of the Book Fair will meet all the lofty expectations inspired by its history of excellence. We encourage all of our City’s residents, young and old alike, to discover, for the first time or once again, the wonders to be found in the pages of a good book; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby honor the African American Children’s Book Project on the Occasion of its 27th Annual African American Children’s Book Fair.

