

Legislation Text

File #: 211010, **Version:** 0

Recognizing the work and contributions of labor and grassroots community activist Ronald Whitehorne, whose leadership and mentorship has inspired generations of activists and leaders in the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Ronald Whitehorne was born on June 6th, 1942, in New York City and later moved with his family to Vermont, where he attended high school and college; and

WHEREAS, After college, following a stint as a street singer and private school teacher, Ron joined VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and was trained in Baltimore, where he helped organize a petition campaign to pressure bar owners who refused to serve Black patrons to desegregate their establishment. Afterwards, Ron was assigned to an agency in Philadelphia that worked with gang members; and

WHEREAS, He joined People For Human Rights, an organization that challenged white people to support the Black Liberation Movement, and later became a staff member. Ron taught in "Liberation Schools"-designed to tell the truth about racism in U.S. history-and organized high school youth to oppose the war in Vietnam and support the Black freedom struggle; and

WHEREAS, Ron burned his voter registration card at a 1968 demonstration that protested all the presidential candidates'-Humphrey, Nixon, and Wallace-support for the war. He was attacked and jailed by police, accused of assaulting three police officers, and, thanks to the National Lawyers Guild and many supporters, was found not guilty at trial; and

WHEREAS, As a member of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), Ron worked for six years as a sleeve presser for men's suits at a garment factory at Broad & Lehigh and helped lead a rank & file movement for union democracy, better wages, improved working conditions and an end to racial and sexual discrimination in the industry. He also edited *The Organizer*, a newspaper that supported worker struggles and liberation movements here and abroad; and

WHEREAS, In 1978, Ron was active in a coalition that opposed the blockade of the MOVE headquarters and was arrested for crossing police barricades to bring food to the people in the house, including children. Opposing Rizzo's "white rights" campaign, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Stop Rizzo Coalition, which helped defeat Rizzo's attempt to change the City Charter and run for a third term as Mayor; and

WHEREAS, Ron was national delegate and a local leader in The Rainbow Coalition, a national organization that sought to unite all oppressed people in a fight for equality, peace, and justice. He worked to nominate Jesse Jackson for President, seeking votes in white working class Kensington and directly challenging the notion that white working people can't be won over to anti-racism; and

WHEREAS, For over a decade, Ron was active in community organizing in Kensington, participating in fights for better housing, more city services, a stop to racial violence, and an end to red lining. He also participated in electoral politics, including the election of Wilson Goode as Mayor; and

WHEREAS, Ron was a public school teacher for over two decades, spending most of his career at Julia de Burgos, where he taught middle school science. In addition to his teaching, Ron served as the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) building representative, and used his position to fight for both teachers and students, as well as for fair education funding. Ron also co-chaired the city-wide PFT community outreach committee, working to build the necessary alliance between teachers and parents; and

WHEREAS, Ron was chosen as Teacher of the Year in 1998 for the Edison Cluster and was a finalist for city-wide honors. Partnering with Quaker leaders and community residents, Ron was the leader of a team of teachers and their students that spent three years restoring the Fairhill Burial Ground, where abolitionists like Lucretia Mott and Robert Purvis were buried; and

WHEREAS, Ron was a founding board member of Youth United for Change (YUC) and served as board chair for 20 years. YUC organized students in the most marginalized schools to demand that students and the community have a voice, student-centered instruction and curriculum, full funding, and an end to the school-to-prison pipeline; and

WHEREAS, Ron was active in Occupy Philly, serving as a leader of the Labor Work Group, which sought to involve unions in the fight to redistribute power and wealth and to get the Occupy movement to understand and support the Labor Movement; and

WHEREAS, After retiring as a teacher, Ron remained active in the education fight. He wrote for the Public School Notebook and served as leadership board chairman. He was also a member of the Teacher Action Group. Following the attacks on Philadelphia schools by Governor Corbett and his allies, Ron helped form the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS), serving as its coordinator. PCAPS was a broad labor-community alliance that opposed budget cuts, school closings, and charter school expansion while advocating for full funding, community schools, and an end to state control of Philadelphia schools; and

WHEREAS, Ron helped start 215 People's Alliance and the Our City, Our Schools Coalition (OCOS), which waged a successful campaign to eliminate the School Reform Commission and return Philadelphia schools to local control. As a 215 member, Ron has organized in his neighborhood and the greater Northeast to elect progressive candidates to office; and

WHEREAS, Ron has long been inspired by the organizing and enriched by the support of his wife of over 40 years, union leader Patty Eakin, who, along with other powerful women, has taught him that patriarchy is a brake on social movements and an obstacle to reaching our full humanity; and

WHEREAS, Ron has provided constant mentorship and encouragement for younger activists and organizers, including many members of City Council; and

WHEREAS, Ron draws his strength from the belief that change happens when ordinary people come together and demand it; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby recognize and honor the work and contributions of labor and grassroots community activist Ronald Whitehorne, whose leadership and mentorship has inspired generations of activists and leaders in the City of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Ronald Whitehorne and his

loving wife, Patty, as an expression of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.