



Legislation Text

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Honoring and recognizing the service and leadership of retired nurse, activist, and current President of the Cecil B. Moore Freedom Fighters, Karen Asper Jordan, who has led a life-long commitment to civil rights activism by protesting, picketing, marching, registering voters, and leading countless direct actions under the guidance and, later, inspiration of the legendary civil rights leader, Cecil B. Moore.

WHEREAS, Karen Asper Jordan was born and raised in North Philadelphia where she attended Philadelphia's Reynolds Elementary School, Vaux Junior High School, and Simon Gratz High School; and

WHEREAS, At the age of sixteen, Asper Jordan was one of hundreds of young Philadelphians who, in May 1965, were mobilized by Cecil B. Moore to picket outside the walls of Girard College. At that time, Girard College continued to defy the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ordering the school to desegregate. Asper Jordan, an original member of what Cecil B. Moore called his "young militants," picketed these walls throughout the entire summer of 1965; and

WHEREAS, After thirteen weeks of fighting to desegregate Girard College, during which she sang freedom songs and saw Philadelphia police brutalize her friends and fellow protestors, Asper Jordan joined thousands to watch Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. take up their cause. Standing in front of Girard College, the massive stone fortress that had been established as a whites-only school in the 19th century, Dr. King declared the college wall "a kind of a Berlin Wall to keep the colored children of God out"; and

WHEREAS, This historic protest, that Asper Jordan helped lead, became the longest sustained civil rights action in Philadelphia history, lasting seven months and seventeen days. After the protest finally ended in December 1965, Asper Jordan and other young militants became known as Cecil B. Moore Philadelphia Freedom Fighters, a relentless group of young Philadelphians who began a life-long commitment to the sole purpose of equality and freedom throughout the streets of Philadelphia. The next year, Asper Jordan graduated from high school and began studying at Cheyney University, but she soon took time off to continue her fight for civil rights or, in her words "to continue doing what was right"; and

WHEREAS, Asper Jordan and other Freedom Fighters protested against slum landlords providing substandard apartments to tenants, Philadelphia store owners cheating customers, and the Vietnam War. Asper Jordan and other Freedom Fighters were instrumental protestors in the historic 1967 Philadelphia student demonstration. Organized by a coalition including the African American Student Society, the Chair of the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Action Committee, and the Philadelphia Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee, the 1967 student demonstration included over 3,500 black and white students who picketed the Board of Education building on Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Alongside other students, Asper Jordan demanded an end to the tracking system holding Black students back from attending college and other opportunities, removing police from public schools, and the provision of up-to-date textbooks, better school conditions, and more Black school instructors; and

WHEREAS, Karen Asper Jordan and the other student demonstrators withstood almost 400 Philadelphia Police Department officers, led by Commissioner Frank Rizzo, wielding clubs, which led to at least two civil lawsuits alleging the use of excessive force. Moreover, Philadelphia police and school administrators prevented another

estimated 10,000 students from attending the demonstration by locking school doors, turning students away from the demonstration, and picking up and holding students through the afternoon. During the protest, a white police officer knocked Asper Jordan to the ground, dragged her along the sidewalk for nearly a block, then savagely beat the man who tried to protect her; and

WHEREAS, Soon after this historic demonstration, Asper Jordan learned that her local emergency room had shut down. This inspired her to enroll in the Jefferson Diploma Nursing program in 1973. Asper Jordan graduated in 1976, and she later went on to receive her Bachelor's in Nursing Science, also from Thomas Jefferson University. Asper Jordan then spent a long career at Jefferson working as a medical-surgical, oncology, and neonatal nurse. Meanwhile, her work with the Freedom Fighters continued; and

WHEREAS, After Cecil B. Moore died in 1979 while serving on the Philadelphia City Council, Asper Jordan and the Freedom Fighters continued to serve his legacy of direct action. Even while working as a nurse with Jefferson Hospital for 41 years-she retired in 2018-Asper Jordan continued countless direct actions alongside other Freedom Fighters; and

WHEREAS, Most notably, the Freedom Fighters fought for and won the changing of the names of Columbia Avenue and the Columbia Broad Street Line SEPTA station to Cecil B. Moore Avenue and Cecil B. Moore Station in 1987 and 1995, respectively. And, in November 2021, Asper Jordan and the other Freedom Fighters were honored with the completion of a Mural Arts mural entitled "Cecil B. Moore Philadelphia Freedom Fighters" at 1702 North 22nd Street. Today retired, Asper Jordan continues to serve as the President of the Cecil B. Moore Freedom Fighters and to fight for freedom in Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby honor and recognize the service and leadership of retired nurse, activist, and current President of the Cecil B. Moore Freedom Fighters, Karen Asper Jordan, who has led a life-long commitment to civil rights activism by protesting, picketing, marching, registering voters, and leading countless direct actions under the guidance and, later, inspiration of the legendary civil rights leader, Cecil B. Moore.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Karen Jordan as an expression of the sincere respect and awe of this legislative body.