Legislation Text

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Honoring the life and legacy of the Honorable Frederica Massiah-Jackson, the first African American President Judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the first African American woman to preside over civil trials in the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, On August 27, 2025, the City of Philadelphia lost one of its legal pioneers, the Honorable Frederica Massiah-Jackson the first African American President Judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She presided over civil trials in the City of Philadelphia as a fair and honest Judge whom the City and its citizens relied on time and time again; and

WHEREAS, Frederica Massiah was born on November 10, 1950, in the North Philadelphia community centered at 16th and Jefferson Streets, attending Oak Lane Country Day School and the Julia Reynolds Masterman School; and

WHEREAS, Following her graduation from the Philadelphia High School for Girls, Frederica Massiah then attended Chestnut Hill College and graduated in 1971. Following Chestnut Hill College, she earned her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1974. During her time at the University of Pennsylvania, Frederica Massiah-Jackson joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., where she was an active and influential member; and

WHEREAS, After obtaining her Law Degree Frederica Massiah-Jackson clerked for Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Robert N.C. Nix Jr. She then practiced Law with Blank Rome Comisky and McCauley and served as Chief Counsel of the Senate Insurance and Business Committee. In 1983, Frederica Massiah-Jackson was elected to the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas where she served for 37 years; and

WHEREAS, Not only was Judge Massiah-Jackson the first African American Woman to be the President Judge in Philadelphia, but she was also the first African American President Judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Additionally, she was one of five women to be on the Court of Common Pleas in 1980. During her career, Judge Massiah-Jackson spent 10 years as a lecturer at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania to share her knowledge with the next generation of business and governmental leaders; and

WHEREAS, For her community impact, Judge Massiah-Jackson was inducted into the Distinguished Daughters Court of Honor by the Philadelphia High School for Girls Alumnae Association. Additionally, in 2010, Judge Massiah-Jackson received the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Cecil B. Moore Award in honor of her long illustrious career as a public servant. In 2013, the University of Pennsylvania Law School honored her professional achievement and service to the school. In 2021, Judge Massiah-Jackson received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Drexel University's Thomas R. Kline School of Law. Also, in 2021, the Philadelphia Bar Association established the Honorable Frederica Massiah-Jackson Community Justice Engagement Award. In 2022, she was recognized with the Justice Michael A. Musmanno Award by the Philadelphia Trial Lawyers Association for her high integrity, scholarship, courage, and concern for human rights; and

WHEREAS, The legacy that Judge Massiah-Jackson leaves will serve as a powerful reminder of the greatness African American women can achieve when given the opportunity. Her insatiable grit and work ethic led her to pioneer a path for young African American women across the City, State, and Region; and

WHEREAS, Other significant accomplishments by the Honorable Judge Massiah-Jackson include: the first African American female lawyer elected to the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association; and the first African American female lawyer elected to the Executive Committee of the Young Lawyers Division of the Philadelphia Bar Association; and

WHEREAS, Judge Massiah-Jackson is survived by her loving daughter, Julia Jackson Duffus and loving son, Thomas Jackson, as well as three grandchildren, brothers, and extensive family and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby honors the life and legacy of Honorable Frederica Massiah-Jackson, the first African American President Judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the first African American woman to preside over civil trials in the City of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed Copy of this Resolution be presented to the family of the Honorable Frederica Massiah-Jackson evidencing the sincere respect and appreciation of this legislative body.

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