

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION celebrating the career and legacy of "Labor's Leading Lady" Lillian Roberts

WHEREAS, A great state is only as great as those individuals and organizations who perform exemplary service to their community, whether through unique achievement in a profession, service to the community or other endeavors, or simply through a lifetime of good citizenship; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to honor the career and legacy of "Labor's Leading Lady" Lillian Roberts; to celebrate this auspicious occasion, District Council 37 (DC 37) will host a Legacy Celebration in her honor on Friday, May 8, 2015; and

WHEREAS, Lillian Roberts began her distinguished career in the labor movement working as a nurse's aide at the University of Chicago Hospital in 1959, when she was invited by Victor Gotbaum to join his staff at AFSCME; and

WHEREAS, With that start, Lillian Roberts would establish herself as the preeminent voice of America's union worker; in 1965, she would come to New York City to work as DC 37's Director of Hospital Field Operations, solidifying her position as a leader within the labor movement; and

WHEREAS, Lillian Roberts' dedication to organized labor and the rights of workers ran so deep that in 1969, rather than relinquish any ground in the fight for respect and economic justice, and to win the right to represent thousands of hospital employees, she was jailed for a month in a futile attempt to thwart her organizing efforts, for allegedly violating an anti-strike law; and

WHEREAS, With Lillian Roberts as Associate Director from 1967 to 1981, DC 37 built the nation's largest union education program and its membership skyrocketed from 30,000 to 120,000; and

WHEREAS, From 1981 to 1987, she served the working people of the Empire State as Labor Commissioner, becoming the first African-American woman in this position; from 1987 to 1992, she was Senior Vice President of Total Health Systems, an HMO, and in 2002, she returned to DC 37 and was unanimously elected as the union's first female Executive Director where she served with distinction until her retirement at the end of her term in 2014; and

WHEREAS, For more than a decade, under her leadership, DC 37 thrived and grew, becoming New York City's largest public employee union, representing 125,000 public workers in New York City and State, 50,000 retirees, 1,000 job titles and 55 locals; and

WHEREAS, Lillian Roberts also served as a Vice President of the New York State AFL-CIO, a Vice President of the NYC Central Labor Council, and Co-Chair of the Municipal Labor Committee; she also holds a Doctor of Humane Letters from the College of New Rochelle; and

WHEREAS, Lillian Roberts has received the NAACP Roy Wilkins Award, and the Freedom Fighter Award from the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, among numerous other awards; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that when individuals of such noble aims and accomplishments are brought to our attention, they should be celebrated and recognized by all the citizens of the great State of New York; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commend the career and legacy of Lillian Roberts, and to wish her well in all her future endeavors; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Lillian Roberts.