

BY: Senator KENNEDY

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim
September 30, 2022, as Every Child Matters Day in
the State of New York

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize official days that are set aside to increase awareness of serious concerns that affect the lives of children living in the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body hereby memorializes Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 30, 2022, as Every Child Matters Day in the State of New York, in conjunction with the observance of National Every Child Matters Day; and

WHEREAS, Every Child Matters Day, also known as Orange Shirt Day, concurrent with Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Day, is held annually on September 30th; this significant day serves as a healing journey for the survivors and indicates a commitment by all who wear an orange shirt that every child matters; it was established to highlight the damage the residential school system did to the well-being of Indigenous children; and

WHEREAS, Every Child Matters Day honors Phyllis Webstad, a Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, where on her first day of school, she arrived dressed in a new orange shirt, which was taken from her; it is now a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom, and self-esteem experienced by Native American children over generations; and

WHEREAS, From the arrival of settlers in North America, Native Americans have faced many atrocities, none more so than residential schools, which were part of this country's extermination policy of Native Americans; the impact from this policy and more specifically residential schools, continues to reverberate throughout Indian Country; and

WHEREAS, Some schools began in the 1700s, but during the 1800s Indian boarding schools became widespread across the United States and Canada; federal and state authorities were permitted to forcibly remove Native children from their families; and

WHEREAS, The goal of residential schools was to "kill the Indian and save the child"; as a result, social workers would go to people's homes and forcibly remove their children; and

WHEREAS, Many children were stripped of their traditional clothes and had their hair cut against their will; it was part of the process to assimilate the children into American society; and

WHEREAS, Not all children were violently removed from their homes and communities; some parents were led to believe their children were going to receive a better education that could not be achieved on a reservation; and

WHEREAS, The Thomas Indian school, also known as the Thomas Asylum of Orphan and Destitute Indian Children, was established in 1855 in Irving, New York, near the Cattaraugus Reservation; and

WHEREAS, This school was considered to be one of the worst residential schools in the country; it was founded by two Presbyterian missionaries who began with a somewhat benevolent purpose; at first, children were being taught their Seneca language; unfortunately, the school took a dark turn when the New York State Board of Charities took it over in 1875; and

WHEREAS, New York State began issuing new rules for this educational institution; for example, they were forbidden from speaking their own language; not only were these children torn away from their families as young as five years old, but they also had very limited access to seeing their families; and

WHEREAS, The Thomas Indian School closed in 1957, long after most other Indian boarding schools were shut down; some of the buildings still stand, and for many of the children, the only trace of their existence are names scrawled on a rafter and a few forlorn headstones in an all-but-forgotten cemetery across from the old school; and

WHEREAS, The damaging impact residential schools had on Indigenous communities may never fully be understood; the residential schools have had a devastating effect on both language and culture, such as generation gaps where elders and young people find it difficult to communicate in their own languages; and

WHEREAS, Today, Indigenous people are all survivors of the residential school system; the consequences of the trauma children endured at these schools is still being felt today and must be recognized and confronted in order to educate the people of the State of New York, in hopes of it never happening again; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim September 30, 2022, as Every Child Matters Day in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York.