

**BY:** M. of A. Lemondes

**HONORING** Damon Gilstrap upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence

**WHEREAS,** It is the sense of this Legislative Body to commend individuals of outstanding character, who have shown initiative and commitment toward constantly pursuing higher goals for themselves, and acting as role models of leadership to be emulated by both peers and young people; and

**WHEREAS,** Attendant to such concern and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to honor Damon Gilstrap upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence; and

**WHEREAS,** The Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence honors State University of New York students who have best demonstrated their integration of academic excellence with other aspects of their lives, which may include leadership, campus involvement, athletics, career achievement, community service or creative and performing arts; and

**WHEREAS,** Established in 1998, the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence is the highest student recognition in the State University of New York (SUNY) system; and

**WHEREAS,** As recipient of this most prestigious award, Damon Gilstrap, who will graduate from Onondaga Community College (OCC) in May with a degree in social services, truly embodies the power of SUNY; and

**WHEREAS,** A proven leader and role model, this extraordinary man is being recognized not only for academic achievement, but also for the profound impact he has had on OCC and the community-at-large; and

**WHEREAS,** Everything about Damon Gilstrap, from his walk to his voice to his accolades, has been hard won; the first half of his life was marked by tragedies and until 2015, he had only a fifth-grade education; and

**WHEREAS,** Damon Gilstrap overcame much adversity, including the untimely death of his mother, the foster care system and incarceration, and landed a job he loved as a groundskeeper for the Syracuse Housing Authority; but soon thereafter, in 2006, he suffered a stroke from three undetected brain tumors; and

**WHEREAS,** During this time, although being told by doctors he would never maneuver without a walker, Damon Gilstrap built an obstacle course in his backyard out of old tires, cinderblocks and rope; he painstakingly navigated the course repeatedly until he was walking on his own two feet; and

**WHEREAS,** In 2015, Damon Gilstrap went back to school to get his high school equivalency and college preparation certificates at the Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center before beginning his education at OCC; and

**WHEREAS,** Damon Gilstrap's determination is inexhaustible and he directs it towards people who might share in his courage; he has given tirelessly of his time and energies within the prison system, mentoring incarcerated youth; and

**WHEREAS,** Furthermore, with a steadfast and unwavering commitment to giving back, he volunteered with the 100 Black Men of Syracuse, Inc. and worked with The Grace Project as a mentor; and

**WHEREAS,** In addition to his successful educational endeavors, Damon Gilstrap published his first book, **From Tragedy to Homeless to Triumph**, in 2014; he is also the recipient of the Norman R. McConney Jr. Award for student excellence; and

**WHEREAS,** With him throughout have been his loving partner, Angela, and his older brother, Shawn, both of whom feel privileged to be a part of his life and rejoice in his many achievements; and

**WHEREAS,** As Damon Gilstrap takes his leave of OCC, he bequeaths a legacy of academic achievement, school involvement and community service to which others may aspire; and

**WHEREAS,** It is the custom 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 this great Empire State; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED,** That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Damon Gilstrap upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Damon Gilstrap.