

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the historical New Rochelle schools desegregation suit, the "Little Rock of the North"

WHEREAS, With February being Black History Month, it is a time to reflect on the struggles and victories of African-Americans throughout our country's history and to recognize their numerous valuable contributions to society; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the historical New Rochelle schools desegregation suit, the "Little Rock of the North"; and

WHEREAS, This important occasion will be recognized with several events this year sponsored by Reflections of Change, a committee led by New Rochelle Schools Superintendent Richard Organisciak and author Linda Tarrant-Reid; the following events include: Change, Challenges and Children, a poetry program, to be held on February 24, 2011, at New Rochelle High School; the opening reception for the Reflections of Change exhibit will be held on March 9, 2011, at New Rochelle High School; a closing reception and program for "History Happened Here"; a 50-year retrospective of the Lincoln School Decision will be held on March 18, 2011, at Daniel Webster Elementary School; and on March 24, 2011, Carlotta Watts LaNier, author of A MIGHTY LONG WAY: MY JOURNEY TO JUSTICE AT LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL, will speak on March 24, 2011, at the New Rochelle Public Library; and

WHEREAS, Fifty years ago, on January 24, 1961, Judge Irving R. Kaufman decided against the New Rochelle Board of Education and found that the city deliberately gerrymandered African-American students into the Lincoln Elementary School, which was at times over 94 percent black; many people do not know that New Rochelle was once called the "Little Rock of the North" and garnered nationwide attention in a desegregation case that went all the way to the United States Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, Most remember the Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education (1954) case, where the United States Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal schools are inherently unequal; the New Rochelle case happened seven years later; and

WHEREAS, In Dr. Gail Guttman's excellent dissertation on the topic, she traced the Lincoln segregation problem back to 1930, when Webster Elementary School opened; the attendance zones put white families in the new school and the black families in Lincoln; the local NAACP protested, but no changes were made, and whites who lived within the Lincoln school district were granted transfers to alternative schools; and

WHEREAS, After a heated school board meeting in 1949, the New Rochelle School Board ended its policy of permissive transfers and strictly enforced the "neighborhood school" policy; this led to lawsuits by white families and people moving out of the district; and

WHEREAS, By the 1950s, a deteriorating Lincoln School, built in 1898, was surrounded by scaffolding; it was the oldest building in use by the school district; the city decided to rebuild and held a vote, which passed; this angered most, but not all, Lincoln district residents; and

WHEREAS, Some thought that a new, but integrated, school would be an asset to their community; in December of 1957, integration expert Dr. Dan Dodson and a highly esteemed committee were enlisted to study the situation, which was growing volatile; the resulting report concluded that the city had in fact created a segregated school; the Board of Education had chosen to ignore the recommendations in the report; and

WHEREAS, In September of 1959, African-American families marched in protest for two days; there were rallies, boycotts and a variety of

failed legal actions; and

WHEREAS, Soon after, the parents of Lincoln students attempted to register their children in more desirable elementary schools; they went to Ward School, a newly constructed modern school, and the families were told by the School Superintendent that Lincoln was just as good as Ward; and

WHEREAS, African-American parents later were rebuffed at the predominantly white Roosevelt School; the school district contended that other New Rochelle schools had a racial mix that matched the demographics of the city as a whole; and

WHEREAS, A lawsuit was filed on October 21, 1960, against the city on behalf of Hallie Taylor's eight-year-old daughter, Leslie, and several other children; the case known as "Taylor v. New Rochelle Board of Education", went to trial and an important witness, Bertha White, who kept careful records, testified how particular school lines were drawn throughout the neighborhoods, as racial housing patterns changed; and

WHEREAS, On January 24, 1961, Judge Irving Kaufman ruled that the school board intentionally segregated blacks and ordered the district to desegregate; the district appealed the ruling and Thurgood Marshall, the chief counsel for the NAACP and later the first black Supreme Court justice, joined the plaintiffs' legal team; the New Rochelle School District lost an appeal in August of 1961, and in December of that year, the United States Supreme Court declined to review the case, ending the litigation; and

WHEREAS, With its last class graduating in 1963, Lincoln was demolished a year later, although its elementary school district exists today; and

WHEREAS, Our society is greatly benefited by the purposeful efforts of individuals who unite for the cause of improving the quality of life for others, and who proactively work toward the goal of dignity for all; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the historical New Rochelle schools desegregation suit, the "Little Rock of the North"; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Reflections of Change committee members Richard Organisciak, New Rochelle Schools Superintendent, and author Linda Tarrant-Reid.