Senate Resolution No. 3324

BY: Senator PARKER

MOURNING the death of Oliver Gray, distinguished leader, mentor and devoted member of his community

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavor served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Oliver Gray of Manhattan, New York, died on Monday, June 29, 2020, at the age of 79; and

WHEREAS, Oliver Gray grew up in New Haven and Hartford, Connecticut, graduated from Hampton University, and later received a master's degree in urban planning from Hunter College; and

WHEREAS, He began his career in the city's civil service, working his way up the administrative ladder at the city's Health + Hospitals Corporation, eventually rising to Assistant Vice President of Community and Patient Relations; and

WHEREAS, In 1983, Oliver Gray was appointed as a special adviser on race relations, immigration, and public education; as the city's Director of the Bureau of Labor Services, he served as a liaison with municipal labor before working at the City Council as Director of Human Services; and

WHEREAS, In 2002, Oliver Gray became the Associate Director of District Council (DC) 37, the position he held at the time of his death; and

WHEREAS, In this capacity, Oliver Gray immediately went to work developing a new generation of union fighters; he was also instrumental in the efforts in developing innovative approaches in reframing organizing and union communications; and

WHEREAS, Oliver Gray was deeply involved as a guiding force for the union during the COVID-19 pandemic, including preparing Union Headquarters for the next phase of the long-term modernization of the building, in addition to assisting the executive director and supervising the DC 37 staff; and

WHEREAS, He had an innate ability to stage-manage the intricacies of helping run a 200,000-member union; he did so with a quiet demeanor, often edged with a humor that reflected wisdom and his personal experiences; and

WHEREAS, Known to many as a quiet giant for remaining incredibly calm in times of crisis, Oliver Gray supervised the recovery of Union Headquarters in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy; and
WHEREAS, Much more than one of the leaders of the largest union in New York City, Oliver Gray was a mentor to many staffers who, like a gardener, he nurtured with soft-spoken advice, pulling them out and up into leadership roles, encouraging and inspiring them by sharing experiences from the vast wealth gleaned from decades of experience as, not only a civil servant but also as an artist; and

WHEREAS, A soldier of labor, based on his experiences of growing up during times of struggle, Oliver Gray also emphasized education, taking on the role of teacher for so many of his employees; and

WHEREAS, Oliver Gray was a bibliophile with a large library devoted to the African-American experience, as well as an avid collector of extraordinary jazz music and a passionate photographer; he could be seen in his East Village neighborhood, riding his bicycle with his camera slung across his back, searching for a scene or moment to capture on film; and

WHEREAS, Oliver Gray is survived by his son, Nkosi Gray-El, and a granddaughter; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Oliver Gray leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Oliver Gray, and to express its deepest condolences to his family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Oliver Gray.