

BY: M. of A. Reilly

MOURNING the death of Josephine "Pat" Miller, renowned champion for children with disabilities, loving wife and mother, and devoted member of her community

WHEREAS, There are certain outstanding members of our community who, through their selfless commitment and dedication, have served to better the quality of life in our community and have had a measurable positive impact on the lives of its residents; Josephine Miller was one such individual; and

WHEREAS, It is with profound sorrow and deep regret that this Legislative Body records the passing of Josephine Miller, noting the significance of her purposeful life and accomplishments; and

WHEREAS, Josephine "Pat" Miller, a relentless supporter and powerhouse for the disabled, died on March 31, 2022, at Eger Health Care and Rehabilitation Center in Staten Island, New York, where she had been a resident; she was 93 years old; and

WHEREAS, At times, she may have been the tiniest person in the room, but her presence was always larger than life; through the years, this special education advocate and fierce protector of the rights of individuals with disabilities had a powerful impact on countless children and families within her community; and

WHEREAS, A true legend on Staten Island, Josephine Miller helped create the first school on Staten Island for developmentally disabled teenagers in 1967, and every day of her life thereafter she supported families, tirelessly serving to ensure people with special needs received the services they were entitled to receive; and

WHEREAS, Josephine Miller was born on June 19, 1926 in Brooklyn, New York, the eldest of the four children born to Michael "Sonny" Scudero, a wholesale fruit and vegetable dealer, and Carmellina "Millie" DiFlorio Scudero, a homemaker; her parents called her "Petsey," a nickname that would stick throughout her life; and

WHEREAS, Josephine grew up on a tree lined block on East 49th Street in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, where just five doors down on the same block, lived the Miller family and as a young girl she met Fred Miller in elementary school; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Midwood High School, Josephine Miller held an assortment of clerical jobs in Downtown Brooklyn; in 1949, after Fred Miller returned from serving his country as a member of the United States Navy, the couple married and moved into an apartment in Downtown Brooklyn, before welcoming their son, Gerald, in 1955; and

WHEREAS, The couple went on to purchase a home on East 49th Street

and welcomed their second child, Diane Lori, who was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome in 1957; during this time, the term "special needs" was virtually non-existent; and

WHEREAS, Upon moving to Staten Island in the early 1960s, Josephine Miller found to her dismay there were no special services available for Diane; subsequently, she took up the cause and together with other parents she met along the way, she educated herself by attending meetings and co-led a new group of parents, teachers and friends of children with disabilities; she was pro-active and reached out to elected officials and educational leaders about the needs of these children; and

WHEREAS, Her victories were hard fought, yet she continued to educate herself; she was instrumental in the 1967 decision in which the Board of Education gave disabled teens their own school; during this time, 26 students got a new lease on life and parents were able to achieve the opening of the first school for developmentally disabled teens on Staten Island; and

WHEREAS, In 1978, her efforts were rewarded when the Occupational Training Center opened its doors in Clifton to 30 children; today, the facility is named the Hungerford School, where Josephine Miller worked for 16 years as a para-professional; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of her work in the trenches, Josephine Miller was named to an advisory committee created by former schools Chancellor Irving Anker; during her time at the OTC, she began working for the Board of Education in the school as a Library/Resource Center aide; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, she worked with the Staten Island Federation of PTAs to build much needed educational support services and resources for the disabled, providing advocacy and service on the Citizens Council for the Community of the Disabled; and

WHEREAS, This extraordinary woman also helped create District 75, a centralized unit charged with administering special education programs for the severely disabled citywide, as well as the Special Olympics, Staten Island's Special Education Training Resource Centers, and Parents in Partnership, an educational seminar for teachers, social workers and parents; and

WHEREAS, Most recently, in the wake of the rising rate of autism and special needs on the Island, Josephine Miller continued to work to create more classrooms, to ensure Individual Education Plans are followed and to advocate for and represent parents and children; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of her pioneering spirit and unwavering commitment to children with disabilities, Josephine Miller was named an Advance Woman of Achievement in 1994; additionally, the Staten Island Mental Health Society presented her with the prestigious Dr. Richard M. Silberstein Memorial Award; and

WHEREAS, Josephine Miller's infinite selflessness and benevolence will shine on through her family's vivid and happy memories; her insight and strength will forever serve as a beacon of love, light and hope to the countless lives she touched; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Josephine Miller leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all who were privileged to have known and loved such an amazing woman; she will be deeply missed and truly merits the grateful tribute of this Legislative Body; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Josephine "Pat" Miller, and to express its deepest condolences to her family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Josephine "Pat" Miller.