

BY: Senator HARCKHAM

MOURNING the death of Raphael F. Blue, distinguished citizen 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 the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue, of Peekskill, New York, died on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, at the age of 74; and

WHEREAS, On August 17, 1950, Raphael F. Blue, the eldest of four children, was born to Jacqueline Millicent "Jackie" Smith and George W. Fleming in Norfolk, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue was raised by Jackie and Jeptha B. Blue in Peekskill; known to family and friends as "Ray," he was the first grandchild of Ursula Mahon-Smith and Coleman Smith, Sr., who raised twelve children, including his beloved mother; he was a favorite nephew to his many aunts and uncles and had many cousins; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Peekskill High School, where he excelled in football, baseball, and every other sport he played, Raphael F. Blue left Peekskill to obtain his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from William Penn University in Oskaloosa, Iowa; he earned his Master of Clinical Social Work degree from the University of Iowa; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue worked as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in the VA Hospital and Adjunct Professor at Mercy College and the University of New York where he taught Sociology and Academic Enrichment Skills; he also created the College Incentive Program for Alternative High School Students in Mount Vernon; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue is Founder and Executive Director of Cross-Cultural Connection, Inc., a non-profit jazz organization which focuses on teaching, developing, and presenting live jazz to students and wider audiences; the annual Jazz in the Park Festival at the Peekskill Riverfront Park was close to his heart; and

WHEREAS, Traveling, playing jazz music, entertaining, teaching, and mentoring were Raphael F. Blue's delights; an experienced reader of sheet music, he played original jazz compositions and taught and mentored musicians in countries on many continents; he traveled all over the world, including the United States Department of State tours to South Africa, Zanzibar, Tanzania, Gabon, and Zambia; his legacy is his music which can be enjoyed in his many recordings; and

WHEREAS, One of the many highlights of Raphael F. Blue's professional career occurred in 2003 when he performed at the Macufe

Festival in Bloemfontein, South Africa; the legendary trumpeter/bandleader, Hugh Masekela, invited him onstage to play with him in front of a huge jazz festival crowd; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue received many awards and recognitions over the years, including the Distinguished Career Award from his Alma Mater, William Penn University, in 2010; in 2013, he was inducted into the New York Hall of Blues as a Master Blues and Jazz Artist; the City of Peekskill proclaimed February 2014 as "Ray Blue Month" to thank him for his service to the Peekskill community and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue is survived by his loving wife of 23 years, Riitta Blue; sons, Maurice and Jason Blue; brother, Sylvester; aunts, Carmen and Angie; nephew, Gary J. Gilchrest; nieces, Michelle R. Gilchrest and Christin "Boo-man-chew" Gilchrest; grandchildren, Ava Christine Blue, Kennedy Reese Blue, Jackson Patrick Blue, Sydney Shea Blue, and Mackenzie Beth Harris; lifetime friends, Billy Thomas, Joe Cattuti, and many of his high school friends; friends, Ralph Leapheart, Moss Duddley, and Alfio Tognocchi from his college years; and many other family members, friends, and music brothers and sisters; he was predeceased by his beloved parents; sister, "Gwennie" Blue-Gilchrest; brother, Steven "Stevie" Blue; and aunts and uncles, David Calvin Smith, Coleman Smith, Jr., Muriel Consuela Smith, Roaul Francis Smith, Raphael Kent Smith, Lola Smith, Lowell Smith, Romaine Smith-Jameson, and Alma Smith; and

WHEREAS, Raphael F. Blue always acted with conviction and a deep commitment to his community; he was transparent and had no problem "telling it like it is"; he was bluntly honest and trustworthy which attracted many people to him; he shared knowledge and gave support to others without hesitation; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Raphael F. Blue 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 Raphael F. Blue; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Raphael F. Blue.