

Senate Resolution No. 2084

BY: Senator STEWART-COUSINS

WELCOMING members of the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association upon the auspicious occasion of their visit to the New York State Capitol on May 12, 2026, and paying tribute to Robert Firstman

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize and honor individuals and organizations whose purpose and actions strengthen our shared commitment to remembrance, service, and the preservation of history; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to welcome members of the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association (TRSMA) to the New York State Capitol on Tuesday, May 12, 2026; and

WHEREAS, The Rohna Survivors Memorial Association was formally established in 1999, when its articles and by-laws were adopted, defining its enduring mission and goals, including: continuing the search for previously unidentified survivors and the families of those who perished, in order to provide long-awaited information about their loved ones; bringing the story of the Rohna before the public to honor those who lost their lives and those who carried out heroic rescue efforts; and fostering connection and fellowship among members through reunions and ongoing communication; and

WHEREAS, The legacy of the 1,015 American servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice for the Nation, as well as those who survived the attack on the HMT Rohna during World War II, must never be forgotten; and

WHEREAS, On November 26, 1943, the HMT Rohna, a requisitioned passenger liner traveling in convoy KMF-26 in the Mediterranean Sea en route to India, carried more than 2,000 crew members and troops when it came under attack by German Luftwaffe bombers; and

WHEREAS, During the attack, a radio-guided missile struck the vessel, causing a catastrophic explosion and ultimately resulting in the deaths of 1,015 American servicemembers and 134 British and Indian crewmembers, marking the greatest loss of United States troops at sea due to enemy action; and

WHEREAS, Among those aboard was Robert Firstman, who would become the last known survivor of the tragedy; and

WHEREAS, Robert Firstman, who passed away on February 15, 2026, at the age of 103, was born in 1923 in New York City to Russian immigrants, raised in the Bronx, and enlisted in the United States Army Air Forces in 1942 while a 19-year-old student at Brooklyn College; and

WHEREAS, Serving as a Morse Code specialist with the 130th Army

Airways Communications System, Robert Firstman was among those aboard the HMT Rohna when it was struck; he survived the sinking after hours in the sea and was ultimately rescued by the USS Pioneer, later continuing his service in the China-Burma-India Theater for the remainder of World War II; and

WHEREAS, For decades, the sinking of the HMT Rohna remained classified, leaving families without answers and survivors unable to speak of their experiences, until the story gradually became known through the efforts of survivors and historians; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body further recognizes that during their visit to the New York State Capitol, members of the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association will present a screening of the documentary Rohna: Classified, a moving account of the tragedy and its legacy; and

WHEREAS, The documentary was produced through the dedicated efforts of Rohna author and past TRSMA President Michael Walsh in collaboration with filmmaker Jack Ballo, following years of interviews with survivors and their families; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body takes this opportunity to honor the memory of Robert Firstman, the last living survivor of the HMT Rohna, and to commend the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association for its tireless dedication to remembrance, education, and historical truth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to warmly welcome members of the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association to the New York State Capitol on May 12, 2026, and to honor their continued efforts to preserve the legacy of the HMT Rohna; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pay tribute to Robert Firstman for his service, resilience, and enduring legacy as the last known survivor of the HMT Rohna tragedy; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association and the family of Robert Firstman.