

BY: M. of A. Zaccaro

MOURNING the death of Willie Colon, pioneering trombonist, composer, vocalist, and cultural icon

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and honor the lives of distinguished individuals whose extraordinary achievements and dedication have made a profound impact upon their communities, this State, and the Nation; and

WHEREAS, It is with profound sorrow and deep regret that this Legislative Body records the passing of Willie Colon, who died on Saturday, February 21, 2026, at the age of 75, and to celebrate a life defined by artistic innovation, cultural pride, and public service; and

WHEREAS, Born on April 28, 1950, in the South Bronx to Puerto Rican parents, Willie Colon was raised by his grandmother, who nurtured his early passion for music and encouraged his artistic pursuits; and

WHEREAS, At the age of 17, he recorded his first album, El Malo, released in 1967, which went on to sell more than 300,000 copies and established him as a formidable new voice in Latin music; and

WHEREAS, As a teenager, he joined the cadre of artists who formed the legendary New York-based label Fania Records, helping to pioneer and popularize what would become known worldwide as salsa music; and

WHEREAS, Over the course of his illustrious career, Willie Colon recorded dozens of influential albums, including La Gran Fuga (1970) and El Juicio (1972), works that expanded the reach and sophistication of Latin music; and

WHEREAS, His musical style uniquely blended elements of jazz, rock, and salsa, incorporating rhythms and traditions from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Africa, while exploring the cultural identity and experiences of Puerto Ricans in the United States; and

WHEREAS, In collaboration with Panamanian singer-songwriter Ruben Blades, he produced groundbreaking recordings including Siembra and Canciones del Solar de los Aburridos, which featured celebrated songs such as Tiburon and Ligia Elena; and

WHEREAS, Throughout his career, Willie Colon received numerous accolades in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to music, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Latin Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 2004; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, Billboard named him one of the 30 most influential Latin artists of all time, affirming his lasting influence on generations of musicians and audiences; and

WHEREAS, Beyond his artistic accomplishments, Willie Colon was a

dedicated social activist who served as a member of the Latino Commission on AIDS and the United Nations Immigrant Foundation, and as a board member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, advancing causes of public health, immigrant rights, and Latino leadership; and

WHEREAS, His life's work stands as a testament to the cultural contributions of Puerto Ricans and Latinos in New York State and throughout the Nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Willie Colon, honoring his remarkable life, his immeasurable contributions to music and culture, and his steadfast commitment to community and social justice; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Willie Colon.