

BY: M. of A. Clark

COMMEMORATING the 150th Anniversary of the
Rochester School for the Deaf

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize and commemorate those enduring institutions whose commitment to education, service, and community enrichment has contributed significantly to the quality of life in the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Rochester School for the Deaf, to be celebrated with a Gala on Saturday, October 24, 2026; and

WHEREAS, Founded on February 3, 1876, and opened to students on October 4, 1876, the Rochester School for the Deaf was originally established under the name Western New York Institution for Deaf Mutes; in April of 1920, the institution officially became known as the Rochester School for the Deaf; and

WHEREAS, Located at 1545 St. Paul Street in Rochester, New York, the Rochester School for the Deaf is a private, tuition-free school serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, and stands today as one of the oldest and most respected schools of its kind in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The origins of the Rochester School for the Deaf are deeply rooted in the compassion and vision of the Perkins family, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Gilman Perkins, whose concern for their deaf daughter, Carolyn, and for other children in the community with hearing loss inspired the establishment of the school; and

WHEREAS, Through the efforts of Zenas Westervelt, then a teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf, who identified deaf and hard-of-hearing children throughout Western New York who lacked access to education, and with the encouragement and support of Mrs. Perkins and other civic-minded citizens, the school was founded to provide educational opportunities to children who had long been underserved; and

WHEREAS, After initially operating in downtown Rochester, the school relocated in 1878 to its present campus on the east bank of the Genesee River, where it has remained a cornerstone of deaf education for nearly a century and a half; and

WHEREAS, From its earliest years, the Rochester School for the Deaf established itself as a pioneer in educational innovation; Superintendent Zenas Westervelt developed the "Rochester Method," combining the manual alphabet with speech to strengthen students' engagement with the English language; and

WHEREAS, Further advancing the field of deaf education, Edmund Lyon,

a friend of the Perkins family, developed the Lyon Phonetic System, a manual phonetic finger alphabet representing the sounds of speech, which was unveiled in 1891 before what is now known as the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; and

WHEREAS, Today, the Rochester School for the Deaf serves students from a 21-county region of New York State and provides comprehensive educational services for deaf and hard-of-hearing children from birth through age 21, including an Early Childhood Center, K-12 Regents-level academic instruction, residential life programming, athletics, and family support services; and

WHEREAS, Committed to academic excellence and accessibility, the Rochester School for the Deaf provides bilingual instruction in both American Sign Language and English, maintains an approximate student-to-teacher ratio of 5:1, and serves a diverse student body representing a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, Through programs such as Signs for All, the school extends its mission beyond the classroom by offering American Sign Language instruction and outreach opportunities to families and members of the broader community; and

WHEREAS, The school's sesquicentennial celebration will include an Anniversary Gala on Saturday, October 24, 2026, at the Hyatt Regency Rochester, as well as an Alumni Reunion on October 23-24, featuring campus archive tours, alumni events, class photographs, and athletic activities celebrating generations of students, faculty, and staff; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, the school's 150th Anniversary logo prominently features Perkins Hall, the first building constructed on campus, which remains an enduring symbol of home, heritage, and community for countless alumni and educators; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and applaud those institutions whose enduring legacy of service has strengthened the educational, cultural, and civic fabric of the State of New York; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Rochester School for the Deaf and to honor its extraordinary legacy of educational leadership, innovation, and service to deaf and hard-of-hearing children and families throughout New York State; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Rochester School for the Deaf.