



HR1172

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, State Representative Monique D. Davis and the Illinois House of Representatives are saddened to learn of the death of renowned poet Maya Angelou, who passed away on May 28, 2014; and

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WHEREAS, Marguerite Annie Johnson was born in St. Louis, Missouri on April 4, 1928 and raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas; at age 13, she and her brother rejoined their mother in San Francisco; she attended Mission High School and won a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Francisco's Labor School, where she was exposed to the progressive ideals that animated her later political activism; she dropped out of school in her teens to become San Francisco's first African American female cable car conductor; she later returned to high school, but became pregnant in her senior year, graduating a few weeks before giving birth to her son, Guy; she left home at 16 and took on the difficult life of a single mother, supporting herself and her son by working as a waitress and cook, but she had not given up on her talents for music, dance, performance, and poetry; in 1952, she began her career as a nightclub singer, and took the professional name, Maya Angelou; and

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WHEREAS, Maya Angelou's performing career flourished; she

1 toured Europe with a production of the opera Porgy and Bess in
2 1954 and 1955, studied modern dance with Martha Graham, danced
3 with Alvin Ailey on television variety shows, and recorded her
4 first record album, Calypso Lady; and

5 WHEREAS, Maya Angelou had composed song lyrics and poems
6 for many years, and by the end of the 1950s was increasingly
7 interested in developing her skills as a writer; she moved to
8 New York, where she joined the Harlem Writers Guild and took
9 her place among the growing number of young black writers and
10 artists associated with the Civil Rights Movement; she acted in
11 the historic Off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's The Blacks
12 and wrote and performed a Cabaret for Freedom with the actor
13 and comedian Godfrey Cambridge; and

14 WHEREAS, In 1960, May Angelou moved to Cairo, Egypt and
15 served as editor of the English language weekly, The Arab
16 Observer; she and Guy later moved to Ghana, where she joined a
17 thriving group of African American expatriates; she served as
18 an instructor and assistant administrator at the University of
19 Ghana's School of Music and Drama, worked as feature editor for
20 The African Review, and wrote for The Ghanaian Times and the
21 Ghanaian Broadcasting Company; during her years abroad, she
22 read and studied voraciously, mastering French, Spanish,
23 Italian, Arabic, and the West African language Fanti; she met
24 with the American dissident leader Malcolm X in his visits to

1 Ghana, and corresponded with him as his thinking evolved from
2 the racially polarized thinking of his youth to the more
3 inclusive vision of his maturity; and

4 WHEREAS, Maya Angelou returned to America in 1964, with the
5 intention of helping Malcolm X build his new Organization of
6 African American Unity; shortly after her arrival in the United
7 States, Malcolm X was assassinated, and his plans for a new
8 organization died with him; she involved herself in television
9 production and remained active in the Civil Rights Movement,
10 working more closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who
11 requested that she serve as Northern Coordinator for the
12 Southern Christian Leadership Conference; his assassination
13 left her devastated, but she found solace in writing, and began
14 work on the book that would become "I Know Why the Caged Bird
15 Sings", which tells the story of her life from her childhood in
16 Arkansas to the birth of her child; it was published in 1970 to
17 widespread critical acclaim and enormous popular success; and

18 WHEREAS, Seemingly overnight, Maya Angelou became a
19 national figure; in the following years, books of her verse and
20 the subsequent volumes of her autobiographical narrative won
21 her a huge international audience; she was increasingly in
22 demand as a teacher and lecturer and continued to explore
23 dramatic forms as well; she wrote the screenplay and composed
24 the score for the film Georgia, Georgia (1972); her screenplay,

1 the first by an African American woman ever to be filmed, was
2 nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; and

3 WHEREAS, Maya Angelou has been invited by successive
4 Presidents of the United States to serve in various capacities;
5 President Ford appointed her to the American Revolution
6 Bicentennial Commission and President Carter invited her to
7 serve on the Presidential Commission for the International Year
8 of the Woman; President Clinton requested that she compose a
9 poem to read at his inauguration in 1993; her reading of her
10 poem "On the Pulse of the Morning" was broadcast live around
11 the world; and

12 WHEREAS, Since 1981, Maya Angelou has served as Reynolds
13 Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in
14 Winston-Salem, North Carolina; she continued to appear on
15 television and in films including Poetic Justice (1993) and the
16 landmark television adaptation of Roots (1977) and she has
17 directed numerous dramatic and documentary programs on
18 television and her first feature film, Down in the Delta, in
19 1996; the list of her published works now includes more than 30
20 titles; and

21 WHEREAS, In 2000, Maya Angelou was honored with the
22 Presidential Medal of the Arts and she received the Ford's
23 Theatre Lincoln Medal in 2008; also in 2008, she narrated the

1 award-winning documentary film The Black Candle and published a
2 book of guidance for young women, Letter to My Daughter; in
3 2011, President Barack Obama awarded her the nation's highest
4 civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom; therefore,
5 be it

6 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
7 NINETY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
8 we mourn the passing of Maya Angelou, a celebrated poet,
9 memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress,
10 historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist, and extend our
11 sincere condolences to her family, friends, and all who knew
12 and loved her; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
14 presented to the family of Maya Angelou as an expression of our
15 deepest sympathy.