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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of Representatives are saddened to learn of the death of Abena Joan Brown of Chicago on July 12, 2015; and

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WHEREAS, Abena Brown was born on Chicago's South Side, the only child of Lueola Reed; she was introduced to the arts at the age of 3 when she began studying dance, then recited, sang, and testified at church; and

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WHEREAS, Abena Brown majored in dance at the University of Illinois and later at Roosevelt University, where she earned a bachelor's degree; she performed at local clubs and Roosevelt University's jazz club; she earned a master's degree in community organization and management from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration, and an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Chicago State University; and

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WHEREAS, During the 1960s, Abena Brown became involved in the civil rights movement and was one of the founders of The Catalyst, which focused on accountability and led to the creation of the National Association of Black Social Workers, the Association of Black Psychologists, and other organizations; and

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1 WHEREAS, In 1971, Abena Brown co-founded Ebony Talents
2 Associates, later to be known as eta Creative Arts Foundation,
3 where she served as President and CEO, gaining experience as an
4 actress, company manager, stage manager, director, and
5 producer; she led the business for 40 years until her
6 retirement in 2011, building it into a major presence in black
7 theater; and

8 WHEREAS, As head of eta Creative Arts, Abena Brown led the
9 purchase and renovation of a 200-seat theater, a gallery space,
10 classrooms and a studio, putting up \$2,000 of her own money,
11 and then led the acquisition of an entire city block from 75th
12 to 76th streets along South Chicago Avenue for future
13 expansion; and

14 WHEREAS, Abena Brown took generations of aspiring
15 playwrights, actors, visual artists, and students under her
16 wing, insisting that the work at eta Creative Arts reflect
17 Chicago's African-American community in a positive light and
18 that neighborhoods were where artists and investments were
19 needed most; she took countless students to West Africa to
20 expose them to art, music, and dance, an effort known as the
21 Africa Express; and

22 WHEREAS, Abena Brown has more than 150 professional theater

1 productions to her credit and received more than 60 prestigious
2 honors and awards, including the Award of Merit from the Black
3 Theater Alliance, the Paul Robeson Award from the African
4 American Arts Alliance, the Governor's Award in the Arts, the
5 Muntu Dance Theatre's ALYO Award, and the Lifetime Achievement
6 Award from the Chicago Joseph Jefferson Committee; in 2000, she
7 was inducted into the Literary Hall of Fame at the Gwendolyn
8 Brooks Center at Chicago State University; and

9 WHEREAS, Abena Brown's widespread civic activities
10 included working as Director of Program Services at the YWCA of
11 Metropolitan Chicago; she served as Chairman of the Advisory
12 Board of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, as a
13 member of the Woman's Board of the Chicago Urban League and the
14 South Shore Chamber of Commerce, and as Vice-Chairman of the
15 board of directors for Muntu Dance Theatre; and

16 WHEREAS, Abena Brown was the proud mother of Olorode Joyce
17 Brown, Yolanda Cannon, and Margaret "Peggy" Lucas; the
18 godmother of Phillip Thomas; the grandmother of Leatha Cannon,
19 Doreen Abena Lucas, Kweli and Isoke Brown, LaMarcus Keys,
20 Raymond Lucas, and Maurice and Lance Cannon; and the
21 grandmother of Urban M. Brown, Jr., who preceded her in death;
22 she had 7 great-grandchildren; therefore, be it

23 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE

1 NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we
2 mourn the passing of Abena Joan Brown and extend our sincere
3 condolences to her family, friends, and all who knew and loved
4 her; and be it further

5 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
6 presented to the family of Abena Brown as an expression of our
7 deepest sympathy.