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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division Staff



DATE: May 23, 2025

RE: **AMENDED RESOLUTION DECLARING MAY 27TH AS VIOLET T. LEWIS DAY IN
THE CITY OF DETROIT**

City Council President Mary Sheffield has requested the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) to produce a resolution declaring May 27th as Violet T. Lewis Day. The requested resolution as amended is attached.

Please reach out if we can be of further assistance.

BY CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARY SHEFFIELD

RESOLUTION DECLARING MAY 27TH AS VIOLET T. LEWIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DETROIT

- WHEREAS** Violet Temple Lewis (1897–1968) was a pioneering Black educator, entrepreneur, and institution-builder who founded the *Lewis College of Business*, formerly known as the *Lewis Business School*, the only historically Black college in the State of Michigan; and ¹
- WHEREAS** Lewis was born in Lima, Ohio, graduated from Wilberforce University, and began her professional career at Selma University, later serving briefly as a bookkeeper for the Madame C.J. Walker Company; she then taught business subjects before founding her own school during the Great Depression; and ^{2 3}
- WHEREAS** Lewis established the Lewis College of Business in Indianapolis in 1928 with the mission of training Black women for professional business careers in an era when secretarial and business positions remained virtually inaccessible to them. She brought the institution to Detroit in 1939, where it operated on John R Street from 1941 to 1976 before relocating to larger facilities due to growth; and over its first fifty years, the college educated more than 20,000 students, transforming lives and expanding economic opportunity for Black students—most of them Black women—across the region; and ^{1 4}
- WHEREAS** In 1978, the Lewis Business College became the Lewis College of Business, a two-year, degree-granting institution and was officially recognized as Michigan’s only HBCU by the federal government in 1987; and ^{1 5}
- WHEREAS** Of the more than 120 HBCUs that have existed in the United States, Lewis is one of only three Black women to establish an HBCU, an extraordinary yet often overlooked feat that underscores her exemplary role in academic history; and ⁶
- WHEREAS** The Lewis College of Business gave tens of thousands of women the opportunity for career development and advancement and included the establishment of two sororities — Gamma Phi Delta and Tau Gamma Delta; and ^{4 5}
- WHEREAS** Lewis was honored as a distinguished force in business and civic leadership and established the March of Dimes Extravaganza Committee in 1953. While Lewis was at the helm, the committee raised almost \$1 million for the March of Dimes Foundation; and ⁷
- WHEREAS** Lewis secured support from Black churches, the Negro press, and civic organizations, built an enduring legacy of educational access and self-determination for Detroit’s Black population, contributing to the city’s civic and economic vitality; and ⁸
- WHEREAS** Lewis’ innovative model of culturally grounded business education and leadership continues to inspire future generations, and her legacy endures in the renaming of the Lewis College of Business as the *Pensole Lewis College of Business & Design*; and

¹ Herb Boyd, *Violet T. Lewis, Educational Trailblazer and Founder of Lewis College of Business*, N.Y. Amsterdam News (June 1, 2017), <https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2017/06/01/violet-t-lewis-educational-trailblazer-and-founder/>

² Lyndia Grant, *A Black History Tribute to Violet Temple Lewis*, Wash. Informer (Feb. 17, 2021), <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/the-religion-corner-a-black-history-tribute-to-violet-temple-lewis/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ Hickman Matt, *The Only HBCU in Michigan Will Be Revived with Design Focus at Detroit’s College of Creative Studies*, ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER (Nov. 3, 2021), <https://www.archpaper.com/2021/11/the-only-hbcu-in-michigan-will-be-revived-with-design-focus-at-detroits-college-of-creative-studies/>.

⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 608.2 (defining “Historically Black Colleges and Universities”), <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-608/subpart-A/section-608.2>

⁶ “5 Colleges That Were Started By or Named After Black Women,” HBCU Since (Aug. 2020), <https://news.hbcusince.com/2020/08/5-colleges-that-were-started-by-or-named-after-black-women/>

⁷ Lyndia Grant, *The Religion Corner: Michigan’s Only HBCU Founder Honored with Highway Designation*, WASH. INFORMER (Aug. 11, 2021), <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/the-religion-corner-michigans-only-hbcu-founder-honored-with-highway-designation/>

⁸ Paul Walter Newbury, *Violet Temple Lewis – An Educational Trailblazer for African American Women*, Liberal Burlblings (Oct. 4, 2017), <https://paulwalternewbury.wordpress.com/2017/10/04/violet-temple-lewis-an-educational-trailblazer-for-african-american-women/>

- WHEREAS** May 27th marks the date of Violet T. Lewis’ birth, and this observance presents an opportunity to annually honor her life’s work, to celebrate Black educational excellence, and to encourage Detroiters to pursue paths of entrepreneurship, civic service, and scholarship; and ⁹
- WHEREAS** Commemorating Violet T. Lewis Day aligns with the City of Detroit’s commitment to racial equity, educational opportunity, and the celebration of local historical figures who advanced civil rights and economic justice; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Council hereby declares May 27th as **Violet T. Lewis Day** in the City of Detroit, recognizing her indelible contributions to education and Black economic empowerment; **BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Clerk is to transmit copies of this resolution to the Mayor’s Office, the Pensole Lewis College of Business & Design, and the Michigan Black Business Alliance as a testament to Violet T. Lewis’s enduring impact and Detroit’s commitment to honoring her legacy.

⁹ *Violet T. Lewis*, Wikipedia (last visited May 21, 2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violet_T._Lewis