

VOTE
6/25/19

**TESTIMONIAL
RESOLUTIONS
AND SPECIAL
PRIVILEGE**

RESOLUTION
In Memoriam

HON. KWAME KENYATTA

WHEREAS, We, the members of the Detroit City Council, mourn the death and celebrate the powerful life of former Detroit City Councilman Kwame Kenyatta. He served the City of Detroit with integrity, a strong moral compass and embodied the consummate public servant. When Kenyatta believed he no longer could serve with the full power entrusted to him by the residents of Detroit due to the appointment of an Emergency Manager, he chose to resign instead of compromise. This action symbolized how Kwame Kenyatta lived his life – devoted to the people and true to the cause. Kenyatta made his transition on May 22, 2019 in his hometown of Bessemer, Alabama; and

WHEREAS, Kwame Olugbala Yao Kenyatta (birth name Norman Tyus) was born on March 15, 1956 in Bessemer, Alabama - a small community that provided him with a firm foundation, but also was the place where he was first confronted with the harsh realities of racism and discrimination. At the age of 12, Kenyatta and his family moved to Detroit. Their arrival occurred in the aftermath of the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, as the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements were at the forefront of the national consciousness. It was at this time in the City of Detroit that Kenyatta’s burgeoning political formation began and his life of activism arose; and

WHEREAS, Kenyatta was educated in the Detroit Public School system and attended Cooley High School. While at Cooley, Kenyatta formed the Detroit Black Student Association to advocate for the inclusion of Black Studies in the curriculum. It also was during this time, that he reclaimed an African name. His first name and surname were chosen in honor of two revolutionary African political titans, Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, and Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister and President of Kenya. Kenyatta continued his studies at Eastern Michigan University and Wayne County Community College. Beyond his formal studies, Kenyatta was an independent scholar, an avid reader and researcher. His vast collection of books focused on the history, culture and political movements of the African Diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Kenyatta was recruited by a neighborhood friend to join the Shrine of the Black Madonna Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, where he continued to learn about organized Black political struggle. Following his brief membership in the Shrine, Kenyatta continued his involvement in organizations committed to Black self-determination and empowerment. He served as head of the youth league of the Pan-African Congress USA (PAC-USA), and was co-founder of the All Afrikan Liberation Committee – a youth-led organization that planned the African Liberation Day march. During this time, Kenyatta was mentored by a host of political and cultural innovators and leaders; and

WHEREAS, In later years, Kenyatta held membership in several organizations, including the Republic of New Afrika, the New Afrikan People’s Organization, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Fihankra International and the National Black United Front. For ten years, Kenyatta directed the Malcolm X Community Center for Self-Determination, a popular community hub. As a cultural consultant, he conducted many educational workshops, Afrikan naming ceremonies, weddings, libation, rites of passage ceremonies and keynote speeches; and

WHEREAS, Kenyatta sought new ways to express and expand his commitment to Black Empowerment and decided to run for public office. He was elected to the Detroit School Board in 1992 and became known as a visionary and passionate civic leader. Kenyatta rose to the position of vice president of the board and, during his five-year tenure, Kenyatta was an outspoken advocate for African-centered education. Kenyatta’s governance was instrumental in the establishment of the Malcolm X Academy, a pioneering all-male, African-centered school. Under his leadership, the school was dedicated to providing an academically-rigorous, culturally-relevant and world-class education to its students. This model became the platinum standard adopted by many school systems across the country. Kenyatta was elected to the Wayne County Commission in 2003 and the Detroit City Council in 2005. In all of his elected positions, Kenyatta remained true to his beliefs and convictions. His 2013 resignation did not quell Kenyatta’s passion for public service nor his commitment to community; and

WHEREAS, Kenyatta relocated to Mississippi to serve as Deputy Chief Administrative Officer in the administration of his longtime friend and comrade, Jackson Mayor Chokwe Lumumba. Following Lumumba’s untimely death in 2014, Kenyatta remained in Jackson. He subsequently returned to city government in 2017, when Chokwe Antar Lumumba won the mayoral seat formerly occupied by his father. Following his retirement from public service, Kenyatta moved back to his hometown of Bessemer, where he resided until his passing. NOW, THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, That the Detroit City Council and the office of Council President Brenda Jones join his family and friends in honoring the life and legacy of Kwame Olugbala Yao Kenyatta. His physical presence will be greatly missed, but the impact of his contributions to Black Liberation and Black community life will live on forever.

Brenda Jones
COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Debra Schul
COUNCIL MEMBER

Janice L. Ligon
COUNCIL MEMBER

Andre J. Spivey
COUNCIL MEMBER

Raquel Castañeda-López
COUNCIL MEMBER

James Ford
COUNCIL MEMBER

June 22, 2019

DATE