

RESOLUTION HONORING FORMER POLICE COMMISSIONER AND JUDGE AVERN COHN

- WHEREAS, Avern Cohn's extraordinary life of public service made an indelible impact on America across two centuries. A Detroit native, he grew up steadfast in his faith, served his country in the military, built a career as a lawyer, and became a legendary federal jurist; and
- WHEREAS, Countless professional, civic, academic, and other organizations have and will continue to recognize and remark upon his lifelong achievements and enduring legacy, which include Judge Cohn's 40 years on the federal bench and archives of court decisions integral to the rule of law; and
- WHEREAS, The Board of Police Commissioners pays tribute to Avern Cohn as a colleague, a believer in police accountability, and a fan of police radio. He often told how he asked his friend, Mayor Coleman A. Young, to appoint him to the Board so that he could listen to police runs. It was a great story that captured his humor, curiosity, and legal interest. However, the bigger story was that his 1975 appointment by Mayor Young placed Police Commissioner Cohn at the center of efforts to reform the Police Department. It is well known that reforms made Mayor Young a target of threats and other attacks, but Commissioner Cohn later shared how those reforms, which included increasing the number of Black and female officers, also made him a lot of enemies; and
- WHEREAS, Commissioner Cohn was never one to be intimidated and served on the Board for over four years. At the Mayor's urging, President Jimmy Carter nominated Commissioner Cohn as a federal judge in 1979; Judge Cohn's appointment made him the only Jewish judge on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. When the Detroit community again sought police reform, fate put Judge Cohn in charge of ensuring the Police Department complied with federal consent decrees in 2014; and
- WHEREAS, Judge Cohn's service as a Police Commissioner and the role of the Board meant a lot to him. He supported the Board's 45th Anniversary in 2019, participated in a 2020 Wayne State panel on Detroit's history of civilian oversight, and, in October 2021, wrote a letter to the Free Press to correct errors about the Board. On Friday, February 4, 2022, he passed away at age 97. Therefore, be it
- RESOLVED, That the Board of Police Commissioners, speaking on behalf of the residents of the great City of Detroit, salutes the life and legacy of former Police Commissioner and U.S. Judge Avern Cohn. As an early Board member and later as a federal judge, he distinctly ensured civilian oversight and police accountability during two historic eras of reform. The Board, which expressed its appreciation during his lifetime, awards this resolution posthumously as a permanent testament of gratitude for Avern Cohn's service, contributions, and lasting influence.