

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 97

By McKenzie

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Yolande Cornelia "Nikki" Giovanni, Jr.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Yolande Cornelia "Nikki" Giovanni, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni was an internationally celebrated author and humanitarian icon who spent her life being a voice for the most vulnerable within her community and working for equal rights for all; and

WHEREAS, born in Knoxville on June 7, 1943, Ms. Giovanni was the second daughter born to Yolande Cornelia, Sr., and Jones "Gus" Giovanni; soon after she was born, her family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, before returning to Knoxville, where she attended Austin High School; and

WHEREAS, although she did not dream of writing from an early age, Nikki Giovanni became one of the most inspirational authors and poets symbolic of the Black Arts movement in the 1960s and 1970s; she discovered her love for reading at the Carnegie Library, a segregated branch of the Lawson McGhee Library, and drew artistic inspiration from her community and her grandparents, Louvenia and John Brown Watson; and

WHEREAS, her body of literary works has included more than two dozen poetry collections, and her first collection, *Black Feeling Black Talk*, was published in 1968; some of her most well-known poems include "Nikki-Rosa," which was featured on her 1971 album, *Truth Is on Its Way*, and "Knoxville, Tennessee," which pays homage to her home region's cuisine and natural landscape, and her family, community, and faith; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Giovanni was proud to follow in the footsteps of her grandfather by attending Fisk University in Nashville, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and was an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Giovanni went on to serve with acumen and alacrity as a professor in the English department at Virginia Tech, where she worked with her partner; she took her much-deserved retirement in 2022, following thirty-five years of service; and

WHEREAS, her renowned activist efforts for African-American rights made waves throughout the Knoxville community and across the globe; although she did not often speak on her role in the Civil Rights Movement, she was known to engage in many battles on behalf of Black Americans, including picketing against segregation in front of the Tennessee Theatre; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Giovanni was a truly charismatic individual and held the power to ignite a crowd; she had numerous public performances, including at the 2022 Big Ears Festival and The Mill & Mine; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to accolades, Nikki Giovanni was a Grammy Award nominee, and she was honored with a historical marker in 2019 at 400 Mulvaney Street, the site where her grandparents' home once stood; she was the recipient of countless awards, including the NAACP Image Award and the Langston Hughes Medal, both of which duly recognized her cultural significance as an African-American writer; and

WHEREAS, she was also deeply devoted to her family, and she always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Giovanni will be sadly missed but fondly remembered by her beloved wife, Virginia Fowler; her son, Thomas Giovanni; her granddaughter, Kai Giovanni; her cousins, Haynes (Delores) Ford, Allison (Beau) Ragan, and Lauren (John) Wilkerson; her nephew, Christopher Black; and a host of additional family members and friends; and

WHEREAS, Nikki Giovanni leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all her chosen endeavors, and her tireless efforts to bring about a more just, humane society will continue to inspire generations to come; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that we should pay tribute to her bountiful life of purpose and service; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor the memory of Yolande Cornelia "Nikki" Giovanni, Jr., reflecting fondly upon her enduring legacy in Knoxville and beyond and extending our sympathy and offering our condolences to her family and friends.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.