

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 396

By Akbari

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Chief Public Defender of
Shelby County Phyllis Aluko.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to specially recognize those estimable public servants who dedicate themselves to improving the quality of life for their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Aluko is one such estimable individual, who recently made history when, on March 25, 2019, she was unanimously approved by the Shelby County Commission as Chief Public Defender of Shelby County, becoming the first woman to ever hold this position; and

WHEREAS, the eleventh individual to serve as Chief Public Defender, Ms. Aluko will lead one of the largest and oldest public defender systems in the country; the Shelby County Public Defender's Office was established in 1917, then only the third public defense system in the country, and predates the landmark *Gideon v. Wainwright* decision establishing public defense systems across the country by nearly half a century; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Aluko was nominated by Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris because of her character, her work ethic, her reputation, and the more than two decades she has spent protecting the rights of indigent people who have been charged with committing criminal offenses; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Aluko's integrity, drive, and experience will serve her well as she stands at the helm of the Shelby County Public Defender's Office, which currently employs ninety attorneys and thirty support staff members who represent 25,000 adults and children annually; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Aluko began serving with the Shelby County Public Defender's Office as a volunteer more than twenty-five years ago; she served in the Trial Division for more than ten years before becoming Division Leader. She later transferred to the Appellate Division, eventually becoming the first woman and the first African-American to serve as supervisor of that division; and

WHEREAS, a graduate of Whitehaven High School and the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree, Ms. Aluko obtained her Juris Doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law in 1992; she is also a 2016 graduate of the Leadership Memphis FastTrack program; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Aluko is a trusted leader in her profession whose opinion and insight are highly valued by her peers; she is a member of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Ben F. Jones Chapter of the National Bar Association, from which she received the President's Award in 2008 and 2016. She also serves on the board of directors for the Memphis Bar Foundation, which is the charitable arm of the Memphis Bar Association; and

WHEREAS, throughout her estimable career, Ms. Aluko has demonstrated the utmost professionalism, ability, and integrity, winning the sincere respect and admiration of members of the bar and bench and her community alike; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor and commend Phyllis Aluko for her honorable and astute service to the people of this State, congratulate her on her nomination and confirmation as Chief Public Defender of Shelby County, and extend our best wishes for her continued success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.