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LRB102 18020 LAW 24875 r

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SENATE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened
3 to learn of the death of former Chicago Teachers Union
4 President Karen GJ Lewis, who passed away on February 7, 2021;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis was born in Hyde Park on July 20,
7 1953; she was a direct descendant of Jackie Vaughn who was the
8 first Black female president of the Chicago Teachers Union
9 (CTU); she was the daughter of Geoffrey Jennings and Martha
10 Gakins, both Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers; as a
11 child, she walked the picket lines when the CTU went on strike;
12 she attended Kenwood Academy High School; she attended Mount
13 Holyoke College in Massachusetts in 1970; she later
14 transferred to Dartmouth College, where she was the only Black
15 woman who applied to be in the class of 1974 and the only Black
16 woman in her graduating class; she married John Lewis in 2001;
17 and

18 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis became a substitute chemistry teacher
19 at Sullivan High School in 1987 and then moved to a full-time
20 teaching position the next year; she started teaching at Lane
21 Tech College Prep High School in 1990; she went to work at King
22 College Prep in 2006 and also increased her union activity; in
23 2008, she joined the newly-formed Coalition of Rank-and-File

1 Educators (CORE), a group of teachers fighting to stop school
2 closings and pushing back against pressures from City Hall;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis followed in her family's footsteps
5 and became a national figure in the labor and education
6 movements; she defeated two-time union president Marilyn
7 Stewart in a run-off election for the Chicago Teachers Union
8 presidency in 2010; and

9 WHEREAS, As president of the Chicago Teachers Union, Karen
10 Lewis worked hand-in-hand with Senator Lightford to pass SB7
11 into law in 2011, the largest piece of education reform in more
12 than 30 years; she held a strike authorization vote in May 2012
13 after the school board voted to rescind a four percent
14 contractual pay raise Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers
15 were set to receive, which led to a remarkable 90 percent of
16 CTU membership voting to strike; she oversaw 26,000 CPS
17 teachers walking off their jobs as the first Chicago teachers
18 strike in 25 years began on September 10, 2012; her leadership
19 was instrumental in leading to a deal being made on September
20 18, 2012, which included giving teachers a seven percent raise
21 over three years, with another two percent if they extended
22 the contract a fourth year, and reduced the percentage of
23 teachers' evaluations based on test scores; she fought against
24 CPS' tendency to borrow money and fought for the protection of

1 "Dreamers", undocumented immigrants brought to this country as
2 children; and

3 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis was elected to a second term as
4 president of the Chicago Teachers Union after receiving 80
5 percent of the vote in May 2013; after running unopposed, she
6 was appointed to her third three-year term in April 2016, just
7 days after she led a one-day teachers walkout to draw
8 attention to deadlocked contract talks; she left office as CTU
9 president in 2014 and was replaced by Jesse Sharkey; she
10 retired from the union altogether due to health concerns in
11 2018; and

12 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis formed an exploratory committee and
13 seriously considered running for Chicago Mayor in 2015;
14 however, she was diagnosed with brain cancer late in 2014,
15 which forced her to abandon her plans; she handpicked Chuy
16 Garcia to be her surrogate, which forced a run-off election
17 against former Mayor Rham Emanuel; despite her faltering
18 health, she participated as she could in the election; and

19 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis spoke three languages; she loved
20 opera, show tunes, and dancing; she performed stand-up comedy
21 at the Woodlawn Tap; and

22 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis was invaluable to the community and

1 to those who knew her; she will be greatly missed; and

2 WHEREAS, Karen Lewis is survived by her husband, John
3 Lewis, and her sister, Keli Jennings; therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL
5 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
6 former Chicago Teachers Union President Karen GJ Lewis and
7 extend our sincere condolences to her family, friends, and all
8 who knew and loved her; and be it further

9 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
10 presented to the family of Karen Lewis as an expression of our
11 deepest sympathy.