

METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT of GREATER CHICAGO MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

SPONSORED *by the* BOARD of COMMISSIONERS RECOGNIZING

HAZEL M. JOHNSON

WHEREAS, born in 1935 in New Orleans, Louisiana, Hazel M. Johnson moved to Chicago in the 1950s with her husband John Johnson, following the promise of a better life in the North. In New Orleans, the Johnson family had resided in a neighborhood encircled by industries referred to as “Cancer Alley”; and

WHEREAS, in 1962 the Johnsons moved to Altgeld Gardens housing project. Opened in 1945 as affordable housing for black veterans returning from World War II and factory workers, the housing project was built on a toxic dump site that was previously owned by the Pullman Rail Company and was surrounded by abandoned factories, hazardous wastes sites, and landfills; and

WHEREAS, while living in Altgeld Gardens, the Johnsons had seven children. Mrs. Johnson was active in the Altgeld community and frequently hosted block parties and field trips for children. In 1969, Mr. Johnson died from lung cancer at the age of 41. At the same time, Mrs. Johnson started noticing issues with the health of her children and neighbors in the community, many of which had also been diagnosed with cancer; and

WHEREAS, the severity of the situation motivated Mrs. Johnson to become an advocate for change. As a result, in 1979 she formed the non-profit organization People for Community Recovery (PCR). PCR partnered with numerous organizations, companies, and government agencies to improve the living conditions in Altgeld Gardens and other lower income housing communities throughout the City of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, one of the first actions of PCR was to get residents of Altgeld Gardens to participate in various studies relating to the correlation between the environment and health in minority communities. One such study found an increased occurrence of chronic pulmonary diseases, as well as finding

that half of the pregnant women suffered complications including miscarriage, stillborn and premature births, and babies born with birth defects; and

WHEREAS, in addition to participating in studies, PCR also demanded change. Under Mrs. Johnson’s leadership, the organization was successful in numerous battles including: removal of asbestos and lead from public housing complexes; training for residents on lead abatement; a settlement to public housing residents for exposure to PCB’s and industrial pollutants; and water and sewer lines installation in Maryland Manor; and

WHEREAS, for her hard work and dedication, Mrs. Johnson and PCR received numerous awards including the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s Environment and Conservation Challenge Award and the top 100 environmental groups, respectively. She was also named the “mother of environmental justice”; and

WHEREAS, on January 12, 2011, Mrs. Johnson passed away. Mrs. Johnson was an environmental justice pioneer before the term existed. She championed the rights of her community not because it was easy, but because it was the right thing to do. Through her advocacy, Mrs. Johnson proved that economic disparity does not justify disparate treatment and access to resources and education; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, on behalf of ourselves and our staff, do hereby recognize Hazel M. Johnson; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be spread upon the permanent Record of Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.



DATED THIS 7th DAY of APRIL, 2022.

BOARD of COMMISSIONERS

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