



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0380-2002, Version: *

IN MEMORIAM

Res. No. 380

Benjamin Ward

By the Entire Council.

Whereas, The Council has learned with deep sorrow of the passing on June 10th, 2002 at the age of 75, of Benjamin Ward, former New York City Police Commissioner; and

Whereas, Benjamin Ward was the son of an Irish father and African-American mother who, by force of character, perseverance and great intelligence, rose through the ranks of the NYPD and broke down racial barriers to become New York's first black police commissioner; and Whereas, Benjamin Ward showed exceptional promise early in his career: in June 1951 he took the New York City Police Department exam and scored the third highest mark among 78,000 applicants; and

Whereas, At the beginning of his civil service career as a foot patrolman in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, Benjamin Ward was confronted with overwhelming

racial prejudice, and to his credit he conducted himself with dignity and without complaint, choosing instead to fight back with such admirable qualities as kindness, insight and respect; and

Whereas, After seven years as a patrolman, Mr. Ward concluded that further advancement would require higher education, and so embarked on a period of study that ended in his acquiring three degrees, the last in law from Brooklyn College, where he was in the top 1 percent of his class;

Whereas, Like so many others who have served this City well, Mr. Ward was in a position of great privilege and power, and understood that with such a position came an even greater responsibility; and

Whereas, Benjamin Ward never abused his position or sought special favor in order to effect change within the NYPD; he changed the Police Department in small but very significant steps: without fanfare, without confrontation, he increased the number of black officers by 17 percent, Hispanic officers by 60 percent, and female officers by 85 percent; and

Whereas, Mr. Ward pioneered community policing, during which his officers pursued social policies while patrolling their beats; this innovative approach to public service still resonates powerfully today, more than 13 years after his departure as commissioner; and

Whereas, On his appointment as police commissioner, Mr. Ward oversaw the nation's largest police force in an era where crime in New York City spiraled upward, but this did not deter him from quick and decisive action: with equal amounts of tenacity, determination and vision, he set himself to the task of improving life on the City's streets, and during his first five months as commissioner he inaugurated an ambitious and successful campaign against quality of life crimes; and

Whereas, Benjamin Ward earned a reputation for uprightness and candor, partly by accepting responsibility during those times when the conduct of NYPD officers was questioned; and

Whereas, During his six year tenure, Mr. Ward strove to make the Police Department a less forbidding place for minorities, and in so doing he restored it to a higher position of public trust and confidence; and

Whereas, Mr. Ward often said that his ambition was to be a "cop's cop," which is to say an individual that fellow officers could look upon as an exemplar of moral guidance, stability, and respect; his career demonstrates quite emphatically that he achieved this goal; and

Whereas, Benjamin Ward leaves behind his loving wife Olivia, daughters Jacquelyn Margie, and Mary, sons Benjamin Jr. and Gregory, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, all who have benefited from his wisdom, love, and care; now, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life of Benjamin Ward, expresses sympathy to his beloved family, and adjourns today in his memory.