



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0693-2024, **Version:** *

Res. No. 693

Resolution calling on the United States House of Representatives to pass, the United States Senate to introduce and pass a companion bill, and the President to sign H.R. 9857, or Mel's Law, to require higher education institutions to award posthumous degrees to eligible deceased students

By Council Members Hudson, Cabán and Hanif

Whereas, Melquain Jatelle Anderson was born and raised in Brooklyn, living in Sheepshead Bay and spending time in Vinegar Hill with his grandmother; and

Whereas, Melquain's goal was to give back to his community, and he had already started to do that by helping young men study for the GED test in order to earn a high school equivalency diploma; and

Whereas, Melquain graduated with an associate's degree from Tompkins Cortland Community College and transferred to The City University of New York's (CUNY's) John Jay College of Criminal Justice ("John Jay") to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology before attending law school; and

Whereas, On October 25, 2017, Melquain was senselessly shot five times and killed while standing at a bus stop near the Farragut Houses in Brooklyn; and

Whereas, Melquain, the only child of Michelle Barnes-Anderson, was just 27 years old and was expecting his first child; and

Whereas, The advocacy of Barnes-Anderson, who wanted to acknowledge the academic accomplishments of her son, and others like her, led to the passage of New York State (NYS) A.4942B/S.5355A, known as Melquain Jatelle Anderson's (Mel's) Law, which was signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul on October 25, 2023, the sixth anniversary of Melquain's death; and

Whereas, NYS's Mel's Law requires that the State University of New York (SUNY) and CUNY

establish policies for awarding posthumous degrees by waiving any remaining credits needed by enrolled matriculated students who die, but who would have been eligible for graduation had they been able to complete their academic coursework; and

Whereas, Pursuant to NYS's Mel's Law, Melquain's father and daughter accepted Melquain's bachelor's degree at John Jay's commencement in May, 2024; and

Whereas, Barnes-Anderson founded the Melquain Jatelle Anderson Foundation: Fighting Against Gun Violence Via Education, which provides emergency funds for struggling sociology students at John Jay and scholarships for students at John Jay and other institutions; and

Whereas, Barnes-Anderson and other advocates are now advocating for a federal version of NYS's Mel's Law; and

Whereas, H.R. 9857, also known as Mel's Law, was introduced in the United States House of Representatives on September 25, 2024, by Representative Nydia Velázquez, representing New York's 7th Congressional District covering parts of Brooklyn and Queens; and

Whereas, H.R. 9857 would require that higher education institutions establish a policy for awarding posthumous degrees to deceased students who had been enrolled in a degree program and who were "in academic standing consistent with the requirements for graduation" at the time of death; and

Whereas, H.R. 9857 would provide the same measure of comfort for families of deceased students outside of NYS that NYS's Mel's Law provides for families in NYS, both for families dealing with gun violence and for families dealing with accidents, illnesses, or other causes of death; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the United States House of Representatives to pass, the United States Senate to introduce and pass a companion bill, and the President to sign H.R. 9857, or Mel's Law, to require higher education institutions to award posthumous degrees to eligible deceased students.

