



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

100 East Erie Street
Chicago, IL 60611

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF MAY 20, 2021

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners honoring the life of Bernarda Wong

WHEREAS, Bernarda "Bernie" Wong was born on October 24, 1943 in Hong Kong. Her early life experiences set the stage for her mission-driven approach to serving others with dignity and respect; and

WHEREAS, at eighteen, Mrs. Wong left Hong Kong in pursuit of education. She attended Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology. This was followed by a Master of Social Work degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri; and

WHEREAS, upon settling in Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood, Mrs. Wong became aware of the lack of social services available in the community. Of particular concern to Mrs. Wong was the inability of immigrants to effectively communicate which adversely affected their employment options. She was also stricken by lack of daycare providers for working families. Mrs. Wong heard many stories of small children being sent to China to live with immigrant's families due to lack of childcare; and

WHEREAS, determined to alleviate this and many other obstacles, Mrs. Wong co-founded the Chinese American Service League (CASL) in 1978. At the time of its establishment, the main goal of CASL was to provide English as a second language classes. However, the organization's mission soon progressed to include various social support services such as early childhood development, elder care, daycare, housing, job training, cooking classes, and financial education; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Wong served as the first President of the CASL, and under her leadership, the organization grew from three employees working with an annual budget of \$16,000 to 500 employees with an annual budget of \$34 million. CASL is now the largest Asian American social service agency in the Midwest. Mrs. Wong led the organization for 38 years, retiring in December of 2016; and

WHEREAS, on March 16, 2017, Mrs. Wong was presented with a resolution from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago honoring her dedication and commitment to the immigrant community in Chicago and recognizing her as a trailblazer for her role with the CASL; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her work with the CASL, Mrs. Wong chaired the Chicago Mayor's Advisory Council on Asian Affairs and was the first Asian appointed to the boards of United Way of Chicago and the Chicago Public Library. She also served on the Governor's Asian Advisory Council, the Leadership Greater Chicago board, the City of Chicago Commission on Human Relations Advisory Council on Equity, the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging board, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights board, and as council member for the Illinois Department on Aging. Mrs. Wong was also a founding member of the Chinese Immigrant Service Agencies Network International, and served as an adviser on the Obama Foundation Inclusion Council; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Wong has earned several honors and distinctions for her work, including receiving the Woman's History Month Legacy Award from Mayor Lori Lightfoot in March of 2021. In 2016, she received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Briar Cliff University in Iowa and in 2015 she received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Washington University in St. Louis. In June of 2013, she received the Jane Addams Making History Award for Distinction in Social Service, given by the Chicago History Museum. Then in July of 2013, she was honored by the Chicago Tribune as a "Remarkable Woman," and by Today's Chicago Woman as one of "100 Women of Influence." In 2012, Mrs. Wong received the prestigious "Champion of Change" award from President Obama, the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Outstanding Community Leader Award for the Chicago Chapter, and the YWCA Outstanding Leaders - Racial Justice Award. In 2010, Harris Bank presented her with the Edward J. Williams Community Leadership Award. Mrs. Wong received the Rainbow/Push Coalition's Community Organizer Trailblazer Award in 2004, as well as the Distinguished Community Leader award from Mayor Richard M. Daley in 1990; and

WHEREAS, on April 27, 2021, Mrs. Wong passed away at her home surrounded by loving family and friends; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Wong is the beloved wife of the late Albert; loving mother of Jacinta; cherished grandmother of Tinana Wong and Matthew Reddix; devoted daughter of the late Jorge and the late Virginia; dear sister of Albert Lo, William Lo, Emanuel Thomas Lo, the late George Lo, the late Charles Lo, and the late Fillis Joe; 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 staff, do hereby honor the life and legacy of Bernarda Wong and extend our sincerest condolences to her family; 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 and that a copy of same, suitably engrossed, be presented to the family of Bernarda Wong.

Dated: May 20, 2021