



# Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

100 East Erie Street  
Chicago, IL 60611

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 21-0175, **Version:** 1

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### **MEMORIAL RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 18, 2021**

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners honoring the life of Mrs. Karen Lewis

WHEREAS, Mrs. Karen Lewis is the former President of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) that is widely heralded as bringing new life to the CTU and helping to earn newfound respect for teachers unions throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Karen Lewis, formerly Karen Jennings, was born on the South Side of Chicago on July 20, 1953. The daughter of a Chicago Public School kindergarten teacher and a woodshop instructor, she developed an appreciation for education early in life. Mrs. Lewis attended Kenwood Academy High School in Hyde Park. Following graduation, she attended Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA briefly and later transferred to Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH. In 1974, she graduated from Dartmouth College with a bachelor's degree in sociology and music. She was the only African American woman in her graduating class. Mrs. Lewis later earned a master's degree in education from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Columbia College in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Dartmouth College, Mrs. Lewis briefly resided in Oklahoma. Upon returning to Chicago, Mrs. Lewis became a chemistry teacher at Lane Tech College Prep High School on the North Side of Chicago. It was here that she met John Lewis, a fellow teacher. In 2001, the two were wed; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis was a chemistry teacher for more than 20 years, resigning only upon her election as the CTU president. Shortly after taking the reigns as president, Mrs. Lewis led the 32,000 members of the CTU into the first teachers strike in Chicago in over 25 years. The strike achieved better working conditions for teachers, and also brought attention to the many issues facing the public school system; and

WHEREAS, shortly after the strike, Mrs. Lewis was elected to a second term as the CTU president. While contemplating a run for mayor of the City of Chicago in 2014, she was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer. In 2018, she retired from the CTU; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis stated that she had once considered becoming a doctor, but fell in love with teaching while studying at Dartmouth College. She believed that unions were the only way to protect the working class against unfairness in the workplace. During her tenure as the president of the CTU, Mrs. Lewis sought to move away from basic issues like salary and compensation packages to broader issues of social justice; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis was a tireless advocate for the working class. In addition to being the president of the CTU, Mrs. Lewis was also a former member of the Chicago Federation of Labor Executive Board, the former Executive Vice President of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and a member of the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE); and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis was fluent in Italian, French, and Latin, loved opera and classical music, and was a gourmet chef. She was an intuitive and astute woman that was known for both her wit and her tell-it-like-it-is personality; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis was once quoted as saying "I've measured my success as a teacher by the hugs at

the end of the year”; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Lewis leaves to honor her legacy her husband John W. Lewis, her stepchildren Antionette, Randolph, and Adolph, her grandchildren Kariah, Aaron, John, Jade, Jasmine, and Journey, and multitude of family, friends, teachers, and advocates; 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 honor the life of Mrs. Karen Lewis and hereby extend our 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.

Dated: February 18, 2021