

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 298 Session of
2002

INTRODUCED BY HUGHES, KITCHEN, TARTAGLIONE, SCHWARTZ, FUMO,
STACK, A. WILLIAMS AND O'PAKE, OCTOBER 16, 2002

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A RESOLUTION

1 Expressing condolences on the passing of the Reverend Paul M.
2 Washington.

3 WHEREAS, The Reverend Paul M. Washington, 81, the elegant,
4 energetic Episcopal pastor who became a relentless champion of
5 the oppressed and such a steadfast acolyte of Christian
6 liberalism that one political leader dubbed him "the high priest
7 of the progressive movement," died Monday, October 7, 2002, of
8 heart failure at Lankenau Hospital in Wynnewood; and

9 WHEREAS, As rector of the Church of the Advocate in North
10 Philadelphia from 1962 until he accepted emeritus status in
11 1987, Father Washington was to many the embodiment of that
12 African-American pastoral tradition in which the struggle for
13 human rights and social justice is the highest form of ministry;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, Mayor John F. Street was one of his admirers; and

16 WHEREAS, "The passing of Father Paul Washington is sad news
17 for Philadelphia's faith-based community and for the entire

1 community," Mayor Street said in a statement yesterday. "Father
2 Paul was a devout man of God, a man of strong convictions and a
3 defiant voice against injustice in all its forms. His abiding
4 faith, compassion for his fellow men and women, and profound
5 love for this city will be his lasting legacy"; and

6 WHEREAS, The Reverend Isaac Miller, who succeeded Father
7 Washington at the Church of the Advocate, said: "Paul, first and
8 foremost, no matter what arena he was operating in, was a
9 priest. He did not function in a way that his identity as a
10 servant of God and a servant of the church was ever confused.
11 Everything he did flowed out of that"; and

12 WHEREAS, With Philadelphia, the nation and the world as his
13 pulpit, Father Washington conferred with Black Panthers in the
14 1960s and lobbied for domestic-partnership benefits for gay city
15 workers in the 1990's; and

16 WHEREAS, He was jailed with homeless protesters and harshly
17 criticized for demanding that Episcopalians pay reparations to
18 the decendants of African-American slaves; and

19 WHEREAS, He challenged canon law and ancient tradition when
20 he opened the doors of his neo-Gothic, 1,500-seat church at 18th
21 and Diamond Streets to the unprecedented, unauthorized
22 ordination of the Episcopal Church's first women priests in
23 1974; and

24 WHEREAS, As a member of the panel that reviewed the city's
25 1985 bombing of MOVE headquarters that left 11 people dead and
26 destroyed 61 homes, he was unflinching in his criticism of
27 police tactics and of the conduct of his longtime friend, then-
28 Mayor W. Wilson Goode, and yet, even Goode remained so admiring
29 of the priest that during a banquet later that year in Father
30 Washington's honor, the former mayor remarked, "If I could be

1 like anyone in the world...I would want to be like you"; and

2 WHEREAS, Although later in life he endured repeated bouts of
3 ill health, including chronic muscle pain, Father Washington did
4 not rest in retirement. In 1994, he was sent to serve as interim
5 pastor of the historically black Church of the Crucifixion in
6 South Philadelphia, where he had been ordained and married. The
7 church was on the verge of closing. He revitalized the
8 congregation and continued to say Mass and give sermons there
9 until last November; and

10 WHEREAS, In April, he returned to the Church of the Advocate
11 for the groundbreaking of the Paul and Christine Washington
12 Family and Community Center, to be built adjacent to the church.
13 The center, named for him and his wife, is scheduled to be
14 completed next year. It will house a summer camp and after-
15 school programs for children; and

16 WHEREAS, Lean and bespectacled, commanding but approachable,
17 Father Washington was known as a compelling preacher with a
18 deep, sonorous voice, whose highly refined speaking style
19 encompassed both the thunderous expressions of the best African-
20 American preachers and the cool restraint of the Episcopal
21 liturgical tradition; and

22 WHEREAS, Paul Matthews Washington was born May 26, 1921, in
23 Charleston, South Carolina, and was raised a Baptist; and

24 WHEREAS, Father Washington was ordained a priest in 1947,
25 continued at the Church of the Crucifixion as assistant deacon
26 for a time, then spent six years teaching at Cuttington College
27 in the West African nation of Liberia; and

28 WHEREAS, Familiar with tools for the hands as well as those
29 of the spirit, he also served as head foreman for the
30 construction of college buildings in the bush, and later made

1 repairs and improvements in his church and rectory in North
2 Philadelphia; and

3 WHEREAS, Father Washington returned to Philadelphia in 1954
4 and became vicar of St. Cyprian in Elmwood, and then in 1962,
5 rector of the Church of the Advocate; and

6 WHEREAS, He soon was absorbed in civil and human rights,
7 serving for seven years on the City of Philadelphia's Human
8 Relations Commission, beginning in 1964; and

9 WHEREAS, At a gathering in his honor of more than 1,000
10 people in 1985, a succession of civic, political and religious
11 leaders spoke of his deeds, celebrated his character, and
12 showered him with honorifics. But perhaps none of the
13 descriptions of the North Philadelphia minister seemed to suit
14 him better or satisfy him more than the one afforded him by then
15 United States Representative William H. Gray, III, who called
16 him "the high priest of the progressive movement in
17 Philadelphia"; and

18 WHEREAS, Father Washington is survived by, in addition to his
19 wife, sons, Michael, Marc and Kemah and a daughter, Donyor; and
20 seven grandchildren; therefore be it

21 RESOLVED, That the Senate note with great sadness the passing
22 of the Reverend Paul M. Washington and extend condolences to his
23 family; and be it further

24 RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be transmitted to
25 the family of the Reverend Paul M. Washington.