



HR0944

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1 HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives wish to congratulate the leadership, staff,
4 and owners of the Chicago Defender on the historic occasion of
5 the newspaper's 121st anniversary in 2026; and

6 WHEREAS, The Chicago Defender is a legendary,
7 Chicago-based publication founded on May 5, 1905 by the
8 visionary Robert Sengstacke Abbott, who launched the
9 monumental Black newspaper with just 25 cents and an
10 unyielding dream to tell Black American stories
11 unapologetically; and

12 WHEREAS, From its humble beginnings being printed in an
13 apartment, the Chicago Defender rapidly evolved into a
14 movement, becoming one of the nation's most influential
15 Black-owned and operated newspapers and distinguishing itself
16 as the first to achieve a circulation over 100,000, the first
17 to feature a health column, and the first to host a full page
18 of comic strips; the newspaper reached a towering national
19 circulation of 200,000 copies by 1920, extending its profound
20 reach far beyond the borders of Illinois; and

21 WHEREAS, Under the fearless leadership of Robert Abbott,
22 the Chicago Defender used moralistic rhetoric, political

1 cartoons, and a bold platform to expose the horrors of
2 lynchings, fight Jim Crow laws, and aggressively champion the
3 migrations of African Americans from the rural South to the
4 urban North, including initiating the historic "Great Northern
5 Drive" on May 15, 1917, which helped reshape national
6 politics, shift voting power, and rapidly grow Chicago's Black
7 population from 40,000 to nearly 150,000 citizens; and

8 WHEREAS, Robert Abbott and editor Lucius Harper
9 established the iconic Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic in 1929
10 to give underprivileged children a chance to shine and
11 celebrate achievement; this event has grown into one of the
12 largest single events in Chicago and one of the largest annual
13 parades in the United States, today drawing over one million
14 attendees and 25 million television viewers; and

15 WHEREAS, John H. Sengstacke assumed leadership of the
16 Chicago Defender in 1940, continuing the paper's fierce legacy
17 of political advocacy by successfully encouraging President
18 Harry S. Truman to integrate the U.S. Armed Services, helping
19 establish the National Newspaper Publishers Association, and
20 expanding the paper into a daily publication on February 6,
21 1956; and

22 WHEREAS, Throughout the Chicago Defender's storied
23 history, the publication has attracted and nurtured the

1 extraordinary writing talents of many famous American authors
2 and cultural icons, including Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn
3 Brooks, and Willard Motley; and

4 WHEREAS, The Chicago Defender's stewardship has
5 successfully transitioned through changing eras, shifting to
6 Real Times, Inc. in 2003, and today, under the dedicated
7 guidance of Publisher Dyanna Knight Lewis, the Chicago
8 Defender has beautifully navigated its digital evolution,
9 continuing to serve as a multifaceted media platform and
10 cultural beacon that elevates Black storytelling, leadership,
11 and excellence; therefore, be it

12 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
13 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
14 we congratulate the Chicago Defender on the occasion of its
15 121st anniversary and for its irreplaceable role in shaping
16 American culture, news, and civil rights, and we extend our
17 best wishes to the paper's publishers, staff, and readers for
18 continued success and vital storytelling in the future; and be
19 it further

20 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
21 presented to Dyanna Knight Lewis as a symbol of our esteem and
22 respect for the leadership, staff, and owners of the Chicago
23 Defender.