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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Fern O. Watts of East St. Louis, who passed away on April 27, 2008; and

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WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts was born on August 4, 1924 in Natchitoches, Louisiana; she was the youngest of three daughters to Jessie and Mary Shannon; and

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WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts grew up in Natchitoches, Louisiana until her junior year in high school, when she moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas; she worked as a florist and in a dress-shop while attending high school; she also volunteered at the high school, where she washed blackboards, swept floors, and assisted with other custodial work; and

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WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts received her formal education in the Louisiana and Arkansas Public School System; she continued her education in East St. Louis at State Community College and Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville; and

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WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts moved to East St. Louis in the early 1940s, where she met her soul mate Leroy "Chops" Watts, Sr., marrying him in 1945; in addition to raising their only child, Janice, they assisted with the upbringing of his three sons

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1 from a previous marriage; Fern and Leroy eventually became  
2 members of the Mt. Parin Baptist Church, which would later be  
3 known as Mt. Paron for more than 60 years; and

4 WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts' work history includes employers  
5 such as Walgreen's and the City of East St. Louis, where she  
6 served in positions including Model Cities, the Community  
7 Development Department, the Economic Development Department,  
8 and the Real Estate Division; and

9 WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts was a community leader and activist,  
10 working tirelessly for the citizens of East St. Louis; her  
11 accomplishments and participation with various organizations  
12 spanned over a 30 year period; she was the recipient of the  
13 Kimmel Community Service Award in 2001 in the environmental and  
14 civic betterment category in recognition of her work; and

15 WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts was involved in many civic  
16 organizations; she was a member of Solutia's Community Advisory  
17 Panel, the New Mississippi River Bridge Project Community  
18 Involvement Group, and the University of Illinois Urban  
19 Planning Group; she was the president and creator of the South  
20 End New Development Organization (SENDO); she was a Past  
21 President of the Metro East Toastmasters Club #2878; in January  
22 of 2007, she was honored as Citizen of the Month by the City of  
23 East St. Louis; and

1           WHEREAS, Despite her numerous other commitments, Fern O.  
2 Watts took the time to read to students at one of the local  
3 elementary schools once a week; and

4           WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts was preceded in death by her  
5 parents; her husband; and her sisters, Willis Lewis and Opal M.  
6 Jackson; and

7           WHEREAS, Fern O. Watts is survived by her daughter, Janice  
8 R. Watts; her godson, Reverend Anthony D. Vinson, Sr.; her  
9 special nephew and niece, Phillip Lewis and Deloris Benjamin;  
10 her 11 grandchildren, 51 great-grandchildren, and 13  
11 great-great grandchildren; her sister-in-law, Derender L.  
12 Watts; her brother-in-law, Ralph T. (Betty) Eubanks; and a host  
13 of other nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends; therefore, be  
14 it

15           RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-FIFTH GENERAL  
16 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn, along with  
17 her family and friends, the passing of Fern O. Watts; and be it  
18 further

19           RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
20 presented to the family of Fern O. Watts as an expression of  
21 our sympathy.