

CITY COUNCIL**The City of Orange Township, New Jersey**DATE June 16, 2020NUMBER 265-2020**TITLE:**

A RESOLUTION CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF MAYOR THOMAS H. COOKE, JR. (Sponsored by Council Member Donna K. Williams and the Orange Municipal Council).

WHEREAS, the City of Orange Township, New Jersey mourns the passing of **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.**; and

WHEREAS, we come together during this time of sadness to pay tribute to and celebrate the life of **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** who was a vital and central force in his family and valued member of the Greater Essex County community; and

WHEREAS, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** was born on October 13, 1929, in Bishopville, S.C., where he spent his early years. He and his family later moved to Baltimore, Maryland. He later enrolled in the U.S. Navy and served during the Korean Conflict. He received a bachelor's degree from Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD, and a master's degree from New York University in New York, N.Y. While attending school, he met and married the love of his life, Audrey Wilson. They raised three children; and

WHEREAS, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.**'s professional career began as an educator in the Newark public school system and included elected terms and leadership positions on the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders and East Orange City Council. He was first elected to the East Orange City Council in 1961, winning at a time when Republicans were still politically competitive. He was re-elected in 1965 and served as chairman of the Public Safety Committee and chairman of the Public Works Committee. He was council chairman in 1968; and

WHEREAS, in 1967, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** became a candidate for the New Jersey General Assembly. At the time, New Jersey had just four Black assemblymen and one Black senator. Cooke became one of a small number of African American legislative candidates. Cooke ran with Frank J. Dodd. While Cooke and Dodd easily defeated Francis T. Craig in the Democratic primary for Assembly, in the general election, the two seats were won instead by Republican Kenneth Wilson and Dodd. Dodd later became New Jersey Senate President, and 1981 Democratic candidate for Governor; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** was elected to the Essex County Board of Freeholders and re-elected in 1973. He was not a candidate for re-election to a third term in 1976 after losing the backing of the powerful Essex County Democratic Chairman, Harry Lerner; and

WHEREAS, despite his ties with the County Chairman becoming loose, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.**, also the East Orange Democratic Chairman, ran for Mayor in 1977. In doing so, he defeated Chairman Lerner's candidate and two-term Mayor, William Stanford Hart, Sr. He was the second African American elected to lead East Orange as Mayor. In 1981, he won another term as Mayor. As a two-term mayor, his focus on the restoration of the city's tax base attracted national attention due to coverage in the New York Times. Additionally, his campaign against slumlords was also widely reported by the New York media. He collaborated with housing advocates and tenant leaders as he recruited businesses willing to invest in the bedroom community. His administration presided over the construction of housing for seniors and the public auction of foreclosed properties. He also was a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, and National Council of Black Mayors, National League of Cities and National Council of Black Mayors; and

WHEREAS, after **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** left office, he worked as a charter school administrator and as an entrepreneur. He owned and operated A.C. Leisure, a travel agency in East Orange, and was co-owner of Check-Well LTD, a combination check cashing and liquor operation in Newark, N.J.; and

WHEREAS, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** entered into eternal life on May 18, 2020, after a valiant battle with complications related to COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Audrey, and daughter, Bonita. He is survived by his: daughter, Julia Cooke-Gaines (Michael); son, Thomas Cooke III (Cynthia); sister, Anne Wilson Johnson; brother, Wilbur Cooke (Doris), many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and other relatives and friends.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Orange Township do hereby offer sincere condolences to the family of **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.** May the warm memories bring joy and comfort in the days ahead.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council urges residents, following the passage of this Resolution to do random acts of kindness towards other in the memory of **Mayor Thomas H. Cooke, Jr.**

Adopted:

Joyce L. Lanier
City Clerk

Tency A. Eason
Council President