

2023 Regular Session

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 94

BY REPRESENTATIVE KNOX

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To express the condolences of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston.

WHEREAS, it is with immense sadness and profound regret that the Legislature of Louisiana has learned of the death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Johnston was drafted to serve his country during the Vietnam War, and upon his return to Louisiana, he and many of his fellow Vietnam veterans struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder and substance addiction; and

WHEREAS, Biggy's addiction struggles continued until his incarceration at Louisiana State Penitentiary in 1974; while incarcerated, he educated himself on the legal and court systems with the goal of assisting individuals in navigating the court system with various matters including filing petitions against nonunanimous jury convictions; and

WHEREAS, Biggy cofounded the Angola Special Civics Project with Norris Henderson, and in 1990, the group worked with the Legislature of Louisiana to pass Act No. 790, which created the first "lifer parole" law; and

WHEREAS, Biggy was released as a result of the project he helped start, and he found employment as a paralegal in New Orleans; in 2003 the Angola Special Civics Project was reconvened outside of prison, under the new moniker "Voice of the Experienced" (VOTE), to organize, educate, and mobilize those impacted by the state's incarceration policies; and

WHEREAS, more than a decade later, in 2016, Biggy was named the lead plaintiff in *VOTE v. Louisiana*; the lawsuit sought to restore voting rights for tens of thousands of Louisianians; and

WHEREAS, Biggy played an even more pivotal role in the passage of Act No. 636 of the 2018 Regular Session of the Legislature, which restored the voting rights to people on probation and those on parole for over five years, including himself; and

WHEREAS, Biggy participated in the Non-Unanimous Jury Coalition, which helped win the passage of an amendment to the state constitution ending the practice under which he was convicted; he lived to see VOTE establish three chapters, massively increase its staff, open multiple reentry house locations, play a pivotal role in criminal justice reform, receive national recognition, launch the Formerly Incarcerated Transition Clinic, and purchase its own facility; and

WHEREAS, Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston leaves to cherish his memory his VOTE family, his peer support group, his loving siblings, and his children; he was a genuinely kind, generous, and cheerful man who, despite his small stature, possessed more than enough heart to justify his nickname; he will be deeply missed but certainly never forgotten.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express heartfelt condolences on the death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston and does hereby extend sincerest wishes that his family, friends, and loved ones find comfort in their shared memories of his beautiful life.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE