

2023 Regular Session

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 95

BY SENATOR DUPLESSIS

CONDOLENCES. Expresses sincere and heartfelt condolences upon the death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston.

1 A RESOLUTION

2 To express sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana
3 upon the death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston.

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

6 WHEREAS, Mr. Johnston was drafted and serve his country in the Vietnam
7 War; and

8 WHEREAS, upon his return to Louisiana and like many others who served in the
9 war, Biggy struggled with the trauma he witnessed and experienced and with addiction
10 which eventually prompted his incarceration at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in 1974; and

11 WHEREAS, while incarcerated, Biggy educated himself in the practice of law in
12 order to assist his immediate community in navigating the court system, including filing
13 petitions against the non-unanimous jury system; and

14 WHEREAS, Biggy co-founded the Angola Special Civics Project with Norris
15 Henderson, and this group worked with the Louisiana Legislature to pass Act 790 of the
16 1990 Regular Session to create Louisiana's first life sentence-parole law, years after this
17 eligibility was retroactively taken from offenders during Louisiana's "tough-on-crime"
18 era; and

1 WHEREAS, Biggy was released through the mechanism he created and became a
2 paralegal upon returning to New Orleans; and

3 WHEREAS, in 2003, the Angola Special Civics Project was reconvened outside of
4 prison under the name VOTE, to organize, educate, and mobilize the community impacted
5 by what had become the most incarcerated state in the world; and

6 WHEREAS, in 2016, after several years of testifying on behalf of voting rights for
7 himself and tens of thousands of others, Biggy became the lead plaintiff in "VOTE v.
8 Louisiana", a lawsuit to restore voting rights; and

9 WHEREAS, in 2018 Regular Session of the Legislature, Biggy was instrumental to
10 the passage of Act 636, restoring voting rights to all people on probation and those who have
11 been on parole over five years, including himself, and on the Act's effective date (March 1,
12 2019), he became the first person on parole to register to vote since the extension of voting
13 rights to black men; and

14 WHEREAS, also in 2018, Biggy was part of the Non-Unanimous Jury Coalition, and
15 helped win passage of a constitutional amendment that ended the Jim Crow practice under
16 which he was convicted; and

17 WHEREAS, Biggy lived to see Voice of the Experienced (VOTE), the progeny of
18 the Angola Special Civics Project, create three chapters, massively grow its staff, play a lead
19 role in criminal justice reform, become nationally recognized, open multiple reentry houses,
20 launch the Formerly Incarcerated Transition (FIT) Clinic, and purchase its own building; and

21 WHEREAS, Biggy Johnston leaves behind a wonderful community of people,
22 especially his VOTE family, his life's work, his Peer Support Group that meets twice per
23 month, and his loving siblings and children. Johnston was a generous, kind and cheerful man
24 of small stature yet truly worthy of the name "Biggy"; he will truly be missed, but will never
25 be forgotten.

26 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana
27 does hereby express sincere and heartfelt condolences on the death of Kenneth "Biggy"
28 Johnston; does hereby further recognize Mr. Johnston's unrelenting dedication to Louisiana;
29 and does hereby extend sincerest wishes that his family, friends, and loved ones that they
30 may find comfort in their shared memories of his life.

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Dawn Romero Watson.

SR 95 Original

DIGEST
2023 Regular Session

Duplessis

Expresses sincere and heartfelt condolences upon death of Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston.