

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 129

BY SENATOR BOUDREAUX

A RESOLUTION

To express the sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the passing of James W. Simmons Jr., a beloved coach, athletic director, educator, and mentor who dedicated more than five decades to influencing high school athletics and shaping young lives throughout the Acadiana region and beyond.

WHEREAS, it is with deep regret and reverence that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana learned of the passing of James W. Simmons Jr., on Sunday, May 11, 2025, at the age of seventy-seven; and

WHEREAS, born on October 27, 1947, in Abbeville, Louisiana, to Reverend James W. Simmons Sr. and Wanda Armstrong Simmons, James Simmons was a devoted family man, veteran, educator, coach, and public servant who committed his life to the service of others; and

WHEREAS, James graduated from Jonas Henderson High School in New Iberia, where he excelled as a student-athlete, participating in baseball, football, and track, and displaying an early passion for sports and statistics that foreshadowed his legendary career; and

WHEREAS, he pursued higher education at Southern University, where he met the love of his life, Mary Evelyn, with whom he shared a joyful union and raised one cherished daughter, Jamie; and

WHEREAS, James proudly served in the Army National Guard and, following his honorable discharge, began a lifelong commitment to youth development and athletics, first as a teacher and coach at Crowley High School in 1970, and later at Acadiana High School beginning in 1983; and

WHEREAS, known simply and fondly by generations as "Coach Simmons", he made a lasting impact through his leadership in football, basketball, and especially track and field, where his passion and excellence earned him district, regional, and state titles and wide respect among peers and students alike; and

WHEREAS, in 1990, James Simmons made history as the first Black Athletic Director of Lafayette Parish School System, a role he held with great distinction for twenty-three years, expanding access and resources for all sports and championing equity and integrity in student athletics; and

WHEREAS, Coach Simmons was renowned not only for his technical knowledge and leadership, but also for his unwavering professionalism, mentorship, and ability to inspire both students and fellow coaches, as well as for always doing things "the right way"; and

WHEREAS, following his retirement from the school system in 2013, he remained active in athletics, serving as a Louisiana High School Athletic Association auditor, officiating track meets at the state and national levels, and continuing to guide and support student-athletes and programs across Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, he pioneered essential reforms, including the introduction of qualified trainers in Lafayette Parish schools and improved collaboration between local recreation departments and school systems, advancing both safety and participation in youth sports; and

WHEREAS, Coach Simmons' lifetime of commitment and excellence was formally recognized through his inductions into the Louisiana High School Sports Hall of Fame in 2012 and the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) Hall of Fame in 2015; and

WHEREAS, his national leadership included service on the NIAAA Board of Directors, NIAAA Strategic Planning Committee, National High School Hall of Fame Steering Committee, and AAU Infraction Committee, where he helped shape policy and uphold standards of excellence in interscholastic athletics; and

WHEREAS, those who knew James Simmons -including friends, colleagues, and countless student-athletes - remember him not only as a coach but as a role model, father figure, man of faith, and symbol of integrity who left an indelible mark on every community he touched; and

WHEREAS, Coach Simmons' legacy lives on in the generations of young people whose lives he transformed through encouragement, accountability, and love, and his example continues to inspire those who strive to lead with purpose and serve with honor.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express its profound sorrow upon the passing of James W. Simmons Jr., and does hereby recognize and celebrate his lifetime of service to youth, athletics, and education; and does hereby offer its deepest condolences to his family, former students and athletes, and the entire Acadiana community who mourn his loss.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to his daughter Jamie M. Simmons.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE