

Resolution No. RS2020-627

A Resolution recognizing Sister Sandra Smithson for her contributions to Nashville and the State of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra Smithson, known to many as simply “Sister Sandra”, grew up in Nashville and attended St. Vincent DePaul, the first Catholic school for black children in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, at a young age, Sister Sandra unselfishly decided that her passion was to become a nun like her teachers and help others; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra excelled in school and graduated with honors from Xavier University New Orleans. She was then granted a teaching fellowship at Fisk University; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra was recruited to be the first woman to host a talk show on Nashville’s first Black radio station, WSOK, called “A Woman Speaks” where the show featured local and national issues in politics, religion and general social issues; and

WHEREAS, she answered an internal call to join the Catholic religious order of School Sisters of St. Francis in 1954; and

WHEREAS, in Costa Rica as a principal she initiated a pilot educational project for poor children in the surrounding barrio and continued to work as a negotiator, spiritual leader and visionary; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, Sister Sandra founded Project Reflect, a nonprofit organization in Nashville whose mission is transforming communities through education and policy reform; and

WHEREAS, as the Executive Director of Project Reflect, she focused the work of the nonprofit on reading literacy and translated its Reading Success program into computer software; and

WHEREAS, in 2002, Sister Sandra strongly influenced the passage of the first state charter school legislation; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, Project Reflect opened Middle Tennessee’s first free public charter school, Smithson Craighead Academy elementary school which serves 270 children from low-income families with 50% African- American and 50% Hispanic/Latinos; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra’s educational philosophy is “inform, reform and transform.” Faith in a God of love undergirds all her work; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, she celebrated 60 years in religious life working in missions in the United States and Central America; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra has been recognized with many accolades and awards including: The Changing Lives Award by the Peabody College of Vanderbilt (2000), St. Katharine Drexel Award National Justice Award (2011), National Service Award, National Black Catholic Congress (2012), Lifetime Achievement Award, TSU Women of Legend and Merit (2013); and

WHEREAS, at 94 years of age, Sister Sandra continues to work to improve the lives of the poor through education; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra reflects the very best of Nashville – someone who is exemplary in her faith and serves as a model for us all to be proud of; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting and proper that the Metropolitan Council recognize Sister Sandra for her lifetime dedication in giving back to the community and transforming the lives of children of poverty in Nashville.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan County Council hereby goes on record as honoring Sister Sandra Smithson for her contributions to Nashville and the State of Tennessee.

Section 2. This Resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.

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