



Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, TN

Legislation Text

File #: RS2022-1728, **Version:** 1

A resolution honoring the life of singer and actress Shonka Dukureh.

WHEREAS, Shonka Dukureh, a singer and actress who portrayed Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton in the recently released film “Elvis”, was found deceased at her Nashville home that she shared with her children on July 21, 2022; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Dukureh was a well-known vocal powerhouse, actress, author, and playwright. Her role as Thornton, an R&B singer who was the first artist to record the song “Hound Dog,” later made famous by Elvis Presley, was her first major film appearance; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Dukureh had a well-rounded and grounded journey as a performing artist. Her ability to make you “feel” in a manner that was emotionally transformative was the core of the beauty and unique essence of her creative gifts. She was a skilled singer and actor and always managed to “stop the show,” even in smaller roles. Over the years, she successfully starred in many touring musicals and plays across the country, and toured internationally with noted recording artists; and

WHEREAS, originally from Charlotte, North Carolina, Ms. Dukureh made Nashville her home. She held a Bachelor’s degree in Theatre from Fisk University and a Master’s degree in Education from Trevecca Nazarene University. Her initial career aspiration was to become a teacher, and for a while she taught second grade at Metro’s Buena Vista Elementary School and devoted time to working with inner city youth through after-school and summer programs. However, she soon learned that her vocal talents and her innate sense for the dramatic were more suited for a career as a performing artist; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Dukureh often talked walking in her faith and the importance of her faith in her life. She was grateful for all that she had accomplished and for the love and teachings that her family had instilled in her. She often acknowledged that in life good things coming your way aren’t guaranteed, and when you encounter them, thankfulness and gratefulness are the least you can express. She strived to instill those same virtues in her children; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Dukureh was set to perform at the John Lewis Way march in honor of the late Representative and Civil Rights leader John Lewis, which was scheduled for July 23, 2022. Tragically, she passed away just days before the event and instead was honored with a tribute after the march; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Dukureh’s powerful voice and artistry will forever live on through her music. The beautiful and spiritual life that she shared with us depicted her heart, not her talent. Her talent was deep, but her heart was deeper. It is fitting and proper for the Metropolitan Council to recognize Shonka Dukureh’s significant impact on the Nashville community and throughout the world.

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 celebrating the life of Nashville actress, playwright, author and vocal powerhouse Shonka Dukureh.

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.