

STATE OF NEW YORK
LEGISLATURE OF ERIE COUNTY

BUFFALO, NY, JULY 12, 2018

*In Remembrance of Western New York Symbol, Leader,
and Guardian Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins*

WHEREAS, Almighty God, in His infinite wisdom, on June 26, 2017, removed from our midst former Erie County Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins, in whose death we have lost a leading presence and protector of our community, a loving father and husband, and whose family has lost a kind and devoted member; and

WHEREAS, throughout his 88 year life in Buffalo and Erie County, Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins rose to prominence as a respected, outgoing, and dedicated servant of our community who not only protected it, but was a symbol of its character, fortitude, and resilience; and

WHEREAS, born on January 26, 1930 in South Buffalo's Old First Ward, Sheriff Higgins' neighborhood and upbringing exposed him to adversity and hardship from an early age, and had a great influence in shaping his life experiences and guiding his path as a US Marine and later as Erie County Sheriff; and

WHEREAS, after quitting high school at 17, Sheriff Higgins took his first job at Donner Hanna Cake Corp. in an effort to support and feed himself beyond what his family could provide him until joining the military at the dawn of the Korean War; and

WHEREAS, eager to serve his country, Sheriff Higgins spent 12 months with the Marine Corps on active duty in South Korea, and was tasked with being a radioman responsible with carrying a 69 pound radio on his back. He would see action in three major battles, and though he could recall many times where he felt in danger, he was ultimately able to survive unscathed and return to Buffalo to begin his 42 year career in law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, joining the Buffalo Police Department in 1956, Sheriff Higgins served in the elite Tactical Patrol Unit and was a founder of the Underwater Recovery Team. After retiring from the Department in 1978, he became Undersheriff to Erie County Sheriff Kenneth J. Braun, and took over for Sheriff Braun upon his retirement and was elected in 1985; and

WHEREAS, as Erie County Sheriff, Sheriff Higgins became known for his many stories revolving around his childhood in South Buffalo, being on the frontlines of major battles in South Korea, and retelling of events on the streets that he and his partner Dick Cotter experienced on the job. He was also proud to be a leading voice against children doing drugs, stood up for fellow veterans, and was always dedicated to his family and loved ones; and

WHEREAS, while working and during retirement, Sheriff Higgins was known to play handball, ski at Kissing Ridge, and take on new adventures such as skydiving even at the age of 83. Not forgetting about education, he earned three college degrees while working as Sheriff, and also became involved with the Erie County Citizens Salary Review Commission; and

WHEREAS, a leader in our community to be revered, loved, and modeled after, this Honorable Body is grateful for the life and work of Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins, and desire to promulgate his legacy and recognize him as an ambassador of Buffalo for all to bear witness to.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Erie County Legislature does hereby mourn the passing of Sheriff Thomas F. Higgins and pause in its deliberations to honor and celebrate his lifelong dedication to protecting and serving the citizens of Erie County, his service to his community and country, and his distinguished tenure as Sheriff and leader in Erie County; be it further

RESOLVED, that this Honorable Body remember the lively spirit, jovial attitude, and loving nature of Sheriff Higgins, and desire for future community leaders to embrace his legacy of service so that it may endure in the protection and guardianship of Erie County.

Hon. Barbara Miller-Williams
Erie County Legislator, 1st District

Hon. Peter J. Savage, III
Chair of the Legislature
Erie County Legislator, 3rd District

Hon. April N.M. Baskin
Majority Leader
Erie County Legislator, 2nd District

Hon. Joseph C. Lorigo
Minority Leader
Erie County Legislator, 10th District

Hon. Kevin R. Hardwick
Erie County Legislator, 4th District

Hon. Thomas A. Loughran
Erie County Legislator, 5th District

Hon. Edward A. Rath III
Erie County Legislator, 6th District

Hon. Patrick B. Burke
Erie County Legislator, 7th District

Hon. John Bruso
Erie County Legislator, 8th District

Hon. Lynne M. Dixon
Erie County Legislator, 9th District

Hon. John J. Mills
Erie County Legislator, 11th District

Hon. Robert M. Graber
Clerk of the Legislature