

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO.314

Reps. Grant, Wegela, Conlin, Hoskins, Edwards, Brabec, Tyrone Carter, Neeley, Young, Brenda Carter, McKinney, Xiong, Bruck, Scott, Rheingans, Bezotte, Haadsma and Witwer offered the following resolution:

1 A resolution to recognize the life and impact of Lillie Lester
2 as the first woman and first Black woman to ever serve as a
3 legislative sergeant-at-arms in the United States.

4 Whereas, It is with great admirations that our body remembers
5 the life of Lillie Lester, who left an enduring legacy on the
6 Michigan Capitol during a pivotal time in the civil rights era; and

7 Whereas, Lillie Rosa Lester was born in Haddock, Georgia on
8 May 5, 1922. She was the only child born to John T and Willie Mae
9 Williams. Her family instilled the values of helping others at a

1 very early age, and she carried it through her life regardless of
2 the enormous obstacles faced by African Americans in the South; and

3 Whereas, Lillie's journey began amidst the challenges of
4 racial segregation in the Jim Crow South. She demonstrated
5 resilience from an early age by working in a canning factory as a
6 teenager. During the Second World War, she contributed to the
7 American mass production effort by testing munition firing pins as
8 one of the iconic "Rosie the Riveters."; and

9 Whereas, In 1948, she made her way to Detroit, where she
10 became active in Detroit churches, teaching Sunday school, and
11 singing choir. Lillie found herself drawn to politics, and she
12 would go on to break the gender and race barrier as an assistant
13 sergeant-at-arms for the Michigan House of Representatives, through
14 her friendship with Rep. Daisy Elliot, who is a co-author of the
15 Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act; and

16 Whereas, Lillie became a trusted link between lawmakers and
17 the public, embodying both strength and compassion. Lillie's
18 influence extended far beyond her official duties. As a founding
19 member of the Michigan Legislative Black Caucus, she played an
20 active role in the civil rights movement, guiding many legislators
21 who considered her a mentor and a maternal figure. Her unwavering
22 dedication, faith, and kindness earned her the affectionate title
23 of "Mother Hen" among those she served; and

24 Whereas, In a heartwarming moment in 2019, Lillie returned to
25 the Capitol, receiving a heartfelt standing ovation when State Rep.
26 Sherry Gay-Dagnogo recognized her significant contributions. The
27 occasion served as a powerful reminder of the lasting mark that she
28 had left on the state legislature; and

29 Whereas, Lillie Lester is survived by her daughters Mary Lewis

1 and Patricia Pullman, as well as four grandchildren, seven great
2 grandchildren, and three great great grandchildren; now therefore,
3 be it

4 Resolved by the House of Representatives, That the members of
5 this legislative body recognize the life and impact of Lillie
6 Lester as the first woman and first Black woman to ever serve as a
7 legislative sergeant-at-arms in the United States. Her
8 contributions to this body and Michigan are treasured and will
9 never be forgotten; and be it further

10 Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the
11 Lester family as evidence of our lasting esteem of her.