

1 By Supervisors Taylor (5), Logsdon, Eckblad, Vincent,
2 Gómez-Tom, Martin, Bielinski, Capriolo, Martinez,
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File No. 25-221

7 **A RESOLUTION**
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9 Recognizing February 18 as Vel Phillips Day in Milwaukee County to celebrate the life
10 and legacy of The Honorable Vel Phillips
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13 WHEREAS, The Honorable Vel Phillips, who was born Velvlea Rodgers on
14 February 18, 1924, grew up in Milwaukee County on Milwaukee's south side and
15 graduated from North Division High School; and
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17 WHEREAS, Phillips lived in Bronzeville, a majority African American
18 neighborhood in Milwaukee, where she began her career; and
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20 WHEREAS, Phillips accomplished many "firsts" in her life while building critical
21 connections across racial divides to influence change in Milwaukee County:
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- 23 • Phillips was the first Black woman to graduate from the University of
- 24 Wisconsin Law School.
- 25 • Phillips was the first woman and first African American elected to the
- 26 Milwaukee Common Council.
- 27 • Phillips was the first female judge in Milwaukee County and the first African
- 28 American judge in Wisconsin.
- 29 • Phillips was the first woman and African American elected to serve as
- 30 Secretary of State.

31
32 ; and
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34 WHEREAS, Phillips is known for these "firsts" and is revered for her determined,
35 non-violent advocacy for civil rights and fair housing; and
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37 WHEREAS, while on the Milwaukee Common Council, she introduced the
38 Phillips Housing Ordinance in 1962 which would have outlawed racial discrimination
39 among landlords and real estate agents in Milwaukee; and
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WHEREAS, Phillips remained committed to public service, continuing to speak to school groups and serve on the boards of the Wisconsin Conservatory and America's Black Holocaust Museum; and

WHEREAS, Phillips passed away on April 17, 2018, at the age of 95—50 years after the passage of federal fair housing legislation; and

WHEREAS, across Milwaukee County, there are several reminders of her legacy including: North 4th Street, from Bronzeville to downtown, named in her honor; and a greenspace in downtown Milwaukee, also named for her; and

WHEREAS, on January 30, 2009, Milwaukee County honored Phillips by renaming the Milwaukee County Children's Court Center to the Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center; and

WHEREAS, at the dedication of the Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center, Phillips explained that she was inspired by Winston Churchill's quote, "We earn a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give," —a testament to the service and character of Phillips;

WHEREAS, Phillips insisted that the words *juvenile justice* be made part of the building's name, "Some of the poor kids who came out there didn't get much justice. I was very determined that while I was there, justice would be distributed evenly;"

WHEREAS, Milwaukee County is dedicated to celebrating the life and legacy of The Honorable Vel Phillips and is appreciative of the work she did to make Milwaukee County stronger and more equitable; and

WHEREAS, the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, at its meeting of April 7, 2025, recommended adoption of File No. 25-221 (vote 5-0); now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors hereby recognizes February 18 as Vel Phillips Day in Milwaukee County to celebrate the life and legacy of The Honorable Vel Phillips annually on her birthday; and

BE IT RESOLVED, the community is encouraged to celebrate Vel Phillips and her legacy annually by learning about her contributions to civil and housing rights and supporting causes that align with her advocacy for racial equity.

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