



MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

RESOLUTION**Honoring The Life Of Myrtle Louise Gregg-LaFay**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) sets aside a portion of its meeting on this date to mark the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); and

WHEREAS, it is important that as we pause to acknowledge the 31 years that the ADA has provided protections and ensured access, we also pay tribute to those who worked tirelessly in the decades before its adoption in the efforts to gain protections for the civil rights of persons with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, one such person was Myrtle Louise Gregg-LaFay, (known affectionately by her closest friends and collaborators as "Myrt"), who passed away on May 31, 2021; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle was a lifelong advocate for disability rights, and spent much of her professional life in service of persons with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle began her career working for Head Start; first as an early childhood educator of children with disabilities, being named Head Start Teacher of the Year in 1975, and later as a "Handicapped Services Advocate" working to ensure inclusion of students with disabilities in all Michigan programs; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle participated in the first White House Conference on the Handicapped (1976-1977), an experience she described as giving her a sense of solidarity with a broader community of people with disabilities, helping her understand the scope of the problems they faced together, and that those problems were not the disabilities themselves, but the rights and access the people with them were being denied; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle was a leader of the Michigan Department of Labor's Commission on Disability (then Handicapper) Concerns, serving as Deputy Director from 1977-1980 and Executive Director from 1980-1987, for which she received a commendation from Governor James Blanchard for her service; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle served on the Michigan Civil Service Commission for more than 34 years; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle served on the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition’s (MDRC) Board of Directors from 2011 until her passing, and was Board President from 2016-2020; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle was instrumental in the Handicapper Advocacy Alliance’s creation of the Center of Handicapper Affairs, (now the Capital Area Center for Independent Living), one of Michigan’s first Centers for Independent Living (CIL), and served on its board of directors; and

WHEREAS, Myrtle’s interest in children was obvious and ongoing. She was a volunteer for the MDRC “Her Power, Her Pride” program, which included a camping experience where young women learned to create and enhance a sense of themselves built on strengths and positive images rather than stereotypes and negative images, and where she was known to be happiest just sitting on the ground with the young women facilitating their exercises and sharing her expertise; and

WHEREAS, after ‘retirement’ Myrtle, who had always been able to help bring understanding between opposing parties by focusing on what was right, became a certified mediator, settling disputes for the Ingham County court system and the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition; and

WHEREAS, fellow disability rights leader and advocate Duncan Wyeth said of Myrtle’s time in service to state government, “We will never be able to count the number of accommodations she single-handedly worked through state bureaucracy to ensure individuals with disabilities had every opportunity to remain in state employment and make contributions;” and

WHEREAS, Len Sawisch, a partner in the earliest efforts in Michigan to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, described Myrtle as: “a teacher, a joiner, a mediator, a manager, an athlete, a photographer, a doting parent, a loyal friend, and most of all, an inspiration for those of us who had the honor to work with her”; and

WHEREAS, in response to a question, Myrtle indicated that she hoped to be remembered as a mother, wife, grandmother, aunt and great aunt – an “early advocate in Michigan’s disability movement,” a “good Head Start teacher”, and as “one who didn’t give up.”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Michigan Civil Rights Commission pays tribute to Myrtle Louise Gregg-LaFay for a lifetime of service to the people of the State of Michigan, and especially to those with disabilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Michigan Civil Rights Commission honors Myrtle as an early and lifelong advocate and leader in Michigan’s disability rights movement, a good Head Start teacher, and most especially as someone who never gave up.



Passed unanimously on the 26th day of July 2021, by the
MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

Stacie Clayton, Chair

Zenna Faraj Elhasan, Vice Chair

Ira Combs, Secretary

Regina Gasco-Bentley

Portia L. Roberson

Richard Corriveau

Anupama Kosaraju

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