



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD Black History Month resolution honors public health expert Dr. Ezike, leading Illinois in fight against pandemic

Out of a global pandemic and international crisis has emerged heroic leaders standing up to a daunting task. One of those leaders is Dr. Ngozi O. Ezike, MD, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

For her undeterred leadership, knowledge, perseverance and commitment to public health, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) Board of Commissioners passed a resolution saluting Dr. Ezike in celebration of the contributions of African Americans during Black History Month.

During the novel coronavirus pandemic, “Dr. Ezike has become a trusted source of information and rationale for Illinoisans struggling to understand this constantly evolving situation,” the resolution states. “She has captivated audiences not only with her superior medical knowledge and expertise, but also with her ability to explain elements in a way that everyone can understand, and her ability to communicate that information in both English and Spanish.”

Each February, the MWRD celebrates Black History Month through a variety of events, educational opportunities and speaking engagements. While much of that celebration has been limited due to the coronavirus pandemic, the MWRD continued this year with a flag raising ceremony and daily videos from commissioners and staff highlighting African Americans, all befitting of this year’s theme entitled: “Persevering in a Time of National Crisis.” This theme was selected to acknowledge the resiliency of people of African descent and their ability to achieve greatness during the struggle of the novel coronavirus global pandemic.

“Dr. Ezike has been a leader, expert and steady and reliable resource to help us overcome these difficult

times,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “Further, as an African American woman, she has also served as an inspiring role model for future generations of young girls to follow, and we are proud to deliver this resolution in her name and grateful for her steadfast partnership to protect our region’s health.”



Dr. Ngozi O. Ezike, MD, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The daughter of Nigerian immigrants, Dr. Ezike was born in Los Angeles, Calif. She is a board-certified internal medicine specialist and pediatrician, having earned her bachelor’s degree from Harvard University and her medical degree from the University of California San Diego School of Medicine. She completed her medical internship and residency at Rush University Medical Center, where she is currently an assistant professor of pediatrics. In addition to being fluent in Spanish, Dr. Ezike also speaks French and Swahili. Prior to joining the Illinois Department of Public Health, Dr. Ezike worked for more than 15 years with Cook County Health, as a care provider at Stroger Hospital of Cook County, and as the medical director for the Austin Health Center, and as the medical director at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center.

“Dr. Ezike was put on earth to serve in this critical role at the most demanding of times, and we are proud to support her in these herculean efforts,” said Vice President Barbara McGowan. “We are moved by her passion and dedication for providing equal health care to all and her dedication to ensure *(continued)*

MWRD Black History Month honors public health expert Dr. Ezike, *cont.*

vaccination resources are provided to all communities across Illinois.”

For more than three decades, under the leadership of Vice President McGowan and the MWRD Board of Commissioners, the MWRD is celebrating Black History Month for the entire month of February to show its support of the Black community and its com-

mitment to diversity. The concept of creating Black History Month can be traced back to 1915 when Dr. Carter G. Woodson traveled to Illinois to participate in the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. But it was not until 1976 when President Gerald R. Ford officially designated February as Black History Month.

METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT of GREATER CHICAGO RESOLUTION

SPONSORED by the BOARD of COMMISSIONERS RECOGNIZING FEBRUARY
as BLACK HISTORY MONTH and HONORING

DR. NGOZI OGBUNAMIRI EZIKE, MD

WHEREAS, the concept of creating Black History Month can be traced back to the year 1915, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson traveled to Illinois to participate in the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which legally ended slavery in the United States. Dr. Woodson was among many that participated as an exhibitor during the three-week celebration; and

WHEREAS, witnessing the interest, curiosity, and demand for knowledge, Dr. Woodson decided to form an organization whose purpose would be to encourage the study of Black history and life, including the innumerable contributions of Black people to civilization. Thus, on September 9, 1915, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) was founded in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, the first official observance was held in February of 1926 and was known as Negro History Week. The second week of February was chosen, as this week incorporated the birthdays of two notable figures in Black history, Abraham Lincoln who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and Frederick Douglass who was an escaped slave and devoted abolitionist; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to tailor the focus during Negro History Week, the ASNLH began creating an annual theme, and in 1937 the Negro History Bulletin was established to promote the annual theme and to create a venue for circulating information about Negro History Week on a larger scale; and

WHEREAS, in the 1940's, there were a handful of instances where the observance of Negro History Week slowly began to expand into a month-long commemoration. Then in the 1960's, with the increasing momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, the popularity of Negro History Week exploded. In many places, including college campuses, instead of celebrating Negro History Week, many students began celebrating Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, President Gerald R. Ford became the first president to recognize Black History Week on February 3, 1975. He issued a "Message on the Observance of Black History Week" and encouraged Americans to "recognize the important contribution made to our nation's life and culture by black citizens" that "have too long been obscured and unsung"; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Black History Week was officially converted into Black History Month. On February 10, 1976, in recognition of this milestone, President Ford issued the first "Message on the Observance of Black History Month". Since 1976, every President has officially designated February as Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, on February 11, 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month". While there have been some years in which Presidential Proclamations were not issued, since 1996 Presidential Proclamations have become a standard tradition; and

WHEREAS, the transformation from a week-long observance to a month was a major accomplishment for the ASNLH (now Association for the Study of African American Life and History). The move to a month-long celebration captured Dr. Woodson's long held belief that the history, accomplishments, and achievements of Black people were too meaningful to be crowded into a one-week event; and

WHEREAS, the District salutes the infinite, dynamic, and illustrious history of African Americans and affirms that the world in which we live would not exist if not for the plentiful contributions that African Americans have made throughout history and continue to make today; and

WHEREAS, the theme of this year's celebration of Black History Month by the District is "Persevering in a Time of National Crisis". This theme was selected (*continued*)



METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT of GREATER CHICAGO RESOLUTION

to acknowledge the resiliency of people of African descent and their ability to achieve great things in the midst of the struggle of the novel coronavirus global pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the District is honored to recognize Dr. Ngozi Ogbunamiri Ezike, MD; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ngozi O. Ezike, MD is the Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. During the novel coronavirus pandemic, Dr. Ezike has become a trusted source of information and rationale for Illinoisans struggling to understand this constantly evolving situation. She has captivated audiences not only with her superior medical knowledge and expertise, but also with her ability to explain elements in a way that everyone can understand, and her ability to communicate that information in both English and Spanish; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ezike, the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, was born in Los Angeles, California. In addition to being fluent in Spanish, Dr. Ezike also speaks French and Swahili; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ezike is a board certified internal medicine specialist and pediatrician. She graduated from Harvard University with honors with a concentration in chemistry. Dr. Ezike earned her medical degree from the University of California San Diego School of Medicine. She completed her medical internship and residency at Rush University Medical Center, where she is currently an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics. Dr. Ezike also has a management certificate from Harvard University Business School; and

WHEREAS, prior to joining the Illinois Department of Public Health, Dr. Ezike was employed with Cook County Health for more than 15 years. While working with Cook County Health, Dr. Ezike served in many roles including as a care provider at Stroger Hospital, as the Medical Director for the Austin Health Center, and as the Medical Director at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ezike is truly a treasure. Her passion and dedication for providing equal health care to all is the foundation on which the medical profession should be based. Dr. Ezike is a woman of strength, wisdom, and character. She is an inspiration for all people of color, but specifically for little Black girls, that it is possible to dream big; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ezike is also a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, on behalf of ourselves and staff, do hereby recognize the month of February as Black History Month and honor Dr. Ngozi Ogbunamiri Ezike, MD; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be spread upon the permanent Record of Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and that a copy of same, suitably engrossed, be presented to Dr. Ngozi Ogbunamiri Ezike, MD.

DATED THIS 18th DAY of FEBRUARY, 2021.

BOARD of COMMISSIONERS

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Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrdd.org.