



City of Columbus

Office of City Clerk
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Legislation Text

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To honor and recognize Willie O'Ree for his numerous contributions to professional hockey and youth development upon the occasion of the 2015 NHL All-Star Weekend in Columbus, Ohio.

WHEREAS, Willie O'Ree was born in 1935 in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. He began his professional ice hockey career in 1956 playing for the Quebec Aces in the Quebec Hockey League; and

WHEREAS, in the middle of his second season with the Quebec Aces, Mr. O'Ree was called up to play for the Boston Bruins in the National Hockey League; and

WHEREAS, on January 18, 1958 in a game against the Montreal Canadiens, Mr. O'Ree became the first black person to play in the National Hockey League. This extraordinary event broke the color barrier in the NHL and paved the way for future players of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O'Ree went on to play 45 games with the Bruins from 1958-61. His long professional career spanned 21 seasons, mostly in the Western Hockey League with the Los Angeles Blades and the San Diego Gulls; and

WHEREAS, even following this extensive and trailblazing career, Mr. O'Ree continues to give back to the sport of hockey. Since 1998, Mr. O'Ree has served as the Director of Youth Development for the National Hockey League. In this role, Mr. O'Ree is an advocate for the Hockey is for Everyone initiative, which has exposed more than 45,000 boys and girls of diverse backgrounds to hockey; and

WHEREAS, over the past decade, Mr. O'Ree has traveled thousands of miles across North America helping to establish 30 local grassroots hockey programs, all geared toward serving economically disadvantaged youth; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O'Ree has received numerous awards and honors as testament to his contributions to the hockey community. He was inducted into the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame in 1984 and received the Lester Patrick Award for outstanding service to hockey in the United States in 2003; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, Mr. O'Ree became the inaugural recipient of the Bill Walsh Champion of Change Award and, in April 2010, he received the Order of Canada, Canada's highest civilian honor. He is the first black hockey player ever to receive the prestigious award. In June 2011 O'Ree also received the Sports Museum's Hockey Legacy Award; and

WHEREAS, Mr. O'Ree's contributions to the sport of hockey are innumerable. His service as an advocate and as an inspirational figure to youth is highly commendable; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:

That this council does hereby recognize, commend, and thank Willie O'Ree upon the occasion of the 2015 NHL All-Star Weekend hosted in Columbus, Ohio.