

Resolution Honoring Ann Atwater

WHEREAS, Ann G. Atwater Pettiford was born July 1, 1935 in Hallsboro, Columbus County, North Carolina, the ninth of ten children, and

WHEREAS, after marrying at the age of 13, Ann moved to Durham, North Carolina in 1953 and ultimately raised two children as a single mother, and

WHEREAS, Ann discovered a passion for housing reform, community organizing and leadership with Operation Breakthrough, working to end the cycle of poverty, and

WHEREAS, Ann served as chairwoman for the United Organizations for Community Improvement, and

WHEREAS, in 1971 Ann and Claiborne P. Ellis served together as co-chairs of the “Save Our Schools” charrette, a series of meetings at R.N. Harris Elementary School involving hundreds of citizens, and

WHEREAS, in an interview with The Carolina Times Ann remarked:

“Mr. Ellis has the same problems with the schools and his children as I do with mine and we now have a chance to do something for them. There certainly is no deep seated love between Mr. Ellis and myself but this school project brings out problems we all have. We are going to have to lay aside our differences and work together. This will be the first time two completely different sets of philosophies have united to work for this goal of better schools. If we fail, at least no one can say we didn’t try,” and

WHEREAS, at the charrette the community discussed school desegregation and made recommendations to the school board, and

WHEREAS, recommendations from the charrette proposed major changes in the school curriculum such as more instruction on dealing with racial violence, creation of a group to discuss and resolve problems before they escalated, and expansion in choices of textbooks to include African-American authors, and

WHEREAS, on the last day of the charrette, Ellis ripped up his Klan membership card in front of a crowd and the unlikely friendship between Ann Atwater and C.P. Ellis set an example of change and reconciliation for the Durham community and beyond, and

WHEREAS, their friendship inspired a book and play by Osha Gray Davidson in 1996, “The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South”, a book by Studs Terkel published in 1992 “Race” and a documentary in 2003 “An Unlikely Friendship,” by Diane Bloom, and

WHEREAS, Ann and C.P. spoke together around the country about their experience for three decades, and at Ellis’s funeral in 2005, Ann delivered his eulogy, and

WHEREAS, Ann married Willie Pettiford in 1975, and became a deacon at the Mount Calvary United Church of Christ, and

WHEREAS, Ann continued her activism at the Durham Housing Authority and became a “freedom teacher” on staff at the School for Conversion, and in her final public appearance the School for Conversion dedicated the Ann G. Atwater Freedom Library in her honor, and

WHEREAS, Ann Atwater is depicted in The Durham Civil Rights History Mural and the Art Wall at the Durham County Courthouse so that our community can learn from our past by coming together, and

WHEREAS, on June 20, 2016, Ann Atwater died at the age of 80 in her beloved community of Durham, NC, and

WHEREAS, friends are asked to honor Ann’s legacy with contributions to the School for Conversion to continue to her work of “making surprising friendships possible.”

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Durham Board of Education honors the life, leadership and legacy of Ann G. Atwater Pettiford.

This the 23rd day of June, 2016.

Heidi Carter, Board Chair

Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Minnie Forte-Brown

Leigh Bordley

Natalie Beyer

Sendolo Diaminah

Matt Sears

Dr. Bert L’Homme, Superintendent