

WHEREAS, in the last three hundred years since Detroit's founding in 1701, we have learned there comes a time when we must pause as city leaders to honor a citizen and make note of a life well lived, a life so wonderfully woven in the very fabric of society that the overall value of our collective history has been demonstrably increased; and

WHEREAS, though our value as a city is often measured by the amount of money made from all those things made in Detroit since our founding - from trading furs, to building cars, to making music – we know the true value of our great city is measured in the people and their lasting contributions to our society; and

WHEREAS, a treasured son of the city, Luther Alton Keith (1950-2025) has established an enduring legacy as a pioneer, visionary and leader. A man of humble beginnings who rose up to challenge the status quo and open doors for generations of Detroit's young people who themselves would become notable leaders in the civic, journalistic, business and political life of the City of Detroit, the State of Michigan and the United States of America. As the founding director of Wayne State University's Journalism Institute for Minorities (JIM), Mr. Keith's work in the pioneering program that was originally created to increase newsroom diversity, has had the bonus effect of a far-reaching impact beyond newsrooms to produce numerous distinguished leaders over the years. These include former Detroit Mayor and City Council President Kenneth Cockrel Jr., and former Wayne State University Board of Governors Member Kim Trent. These are just two of the hundreds of other students that have gone on to garner great success in the legal, business and entertainment fields from Mr. Keith's efforts at WSU and as a trustee at the Rosa Parks Scholarship Foundation. Since 1980 the Detroit organization has awarded more than \$3 million in scholarships to 2,250 students with great success; and

WHEREAS, in 2025 the City of Detroit remains at the epicenter of the nation's 14th largest media market whose influence on American politics, culture and life is felt across the nation. This influence and reach has grown over the years as its citizens, particularly African Americans, have become accomplished leaders in areas shaped by our position as one of the largest media markets in the country - journalism, pop culture, business and the body politic. Mr. Keith's efforts have sown the seeds of journalistic success producing leaders such as Detroit Free Press Managing Editor James Hill as well as reporters, editors, and producers at every news outlet in the region. Mr. Keith's JIM students, some recruited during his visits to high schools, have gone on to work and lead at national companies in every medium across the United States; and

WHEREAS, the City of Detroit applauds the seeding of Detroit's Black and minority leadership and influence in journalism and beyond by Luther Keith, who was willing to challenge the status quo and take risks at the cost of great personal and professional sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Keith was born in Detroit on October 9, 1950, as the second of four children, to Mittie Savella Ashworth and Luther Caesar Keith. He grew up on the city's westside where he attended Sampson Elementary, St. Agnes Junior High, Detroit Cathedral High School, and the University of Detroit. Mr. Keith excelled at sports and discovered a talent for reporting and

writing. While in college, he began working as a “jumper” in the circulation department at The Detroit News in 1969. On the basement loading dock, he stacked newspapers onto delivery trucks before riding in the back during the early morning hours, leaping off to toss bundles onto street corners for distribution; and

WHEREAS, after graduating in 1972, Mr. Keith embarked on a remarkable, thirty-year career at one of the city’s leading news organizations *The Detroit News*, where he achieved several historical firsts. He became the first Black sports reporter for a major daily newspaper in Detroit, the first Black state Capitol bureau correspondent, and the first Black editor when he was appointed assistant city editor, overseeing a five-person team covering criminal courts and other local affairs. He also became the publication’s first Black Assistant Managing Editor and the first Black journalist to appear on its masthead.

WHEREAS, Luther Keith pushed the boundaries of news coverage to shine a light on the rich culture and fabric of Detroit in 1993 when he created “On Detroit.” For a decade, this weekly tabloid section told the stories of the city’s neighborhoods, businesses, churches, schools, and community voices—groups often overlooked by major media outlets. *On Detroit* earned multiple honors, including the city’s “Spirit of Detroit” award, and served as a prototype for what is now known as engaged, community-centered journalism. He was inducted to the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame in 1995, becoming the youngest person ever inducted at the time. Mr. Keith went on to hold the roles of Public Editor, Senior Managing Editor, and Columnist, penning weekly opinion editorials. His trailblazing career led to a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Professional Journalists in 2024; and

WHEREAS, Luther Alton Keith continued to blossom as a true renaissance man after retiring from journalism to fully pursue a career as a local blues artist and community organizer. His 2006 non-profit named ARISE Detroit! grew from a coalition of 22 organizations to more than 400 partners, uniting nonprofits, churches, schools, businesses, and media in a shared mission to strengthen Detroit. One of the highlights is Neighborhoods Day, an annual citywide event held each August, bringing together community groups for beautification projects, youth programs, festivals, and more. At its peak, Neighborhoods Day engaged nearly 400 community groups, became a powerful symbol of unity, progress, and the power of people who are willing to work together to “Be Part of the Change.” ; and

WHEREAS, as a musical artist, Luther “Badman” Keith released five original blues albums he would produce: *Badman* (1999), *Thunder In My Blues* (2003), *Blues Nation* (2010), *Bluesmen Are Kings* (2015) and *Working Bluesman* (2020). He recorded more than 50 songs, many of them original compositions, and performed everywhere from Detroit’s blues clubs to international stages in Belgium, Brussels, Antwerp and Portugal. He received countless music awards and accolades throughout his career; and

WHEREAS, Luther Alton Keith (1950-2025), dedicated husband, loving father, esteemed journalist, bold community organizer and musician extraordinaire has established an enduring legacy as a pioneer, visionary and leader for the great City of Detroit; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, That Councilmember At-Large Mary Waters and the members of the Detroit City Council on this day honors Luther Alton Keith, our beloved citizen, and takes note of his life well lived, and so wonderfully woven in the very fabric of Detroit that the overall value of our collective history has been demonstrably increased by his efforts. We encourage everyone to join us in giving thanks for Luther Alton Keith (1950-2025) and his life of selfless service in devotion to the betterment of the citizens of the City of Detroit for generations to come. May he be an example for us all.