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MILELE A. COGGS

6th District Alderwoman

Velma L. Coggs: Her Story

Statement of Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs January 5, 2011

On Monday, January 3, 2011, my mother, Velma L. Coggs, transitioned to eternal life.

My extended family and I greatly appreciate the many wishes of condolences, messages of support, and prayers we have received during this very difficult past 48 hours. My mother was a loving, bright, talented, positive, and active person in the community, and I want people to know her story.

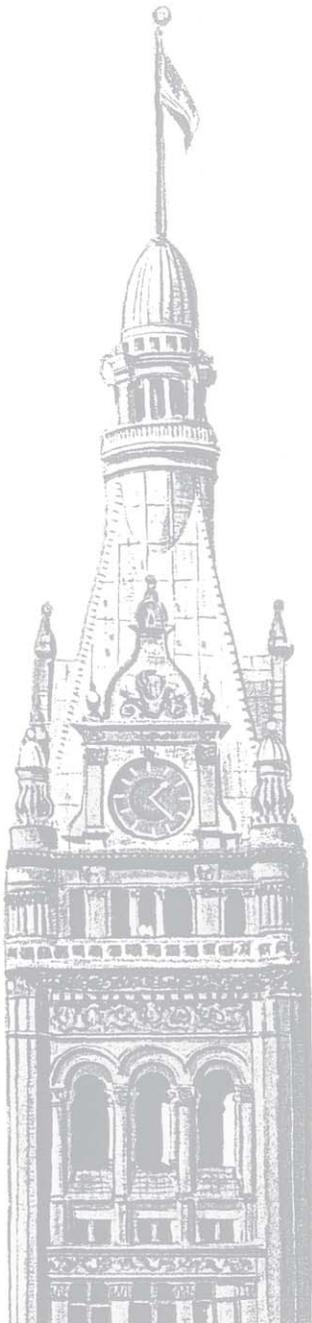
Velma was born September 17, 1946, to Calvin and Erma Coggs, and raised in the heart of Milwaukee's north side -- one of six children in the immediate family and with five other siblings in her extended family.

Velma's parents expected each of their children to make valuable contributions to the community, and each child had to be active in school, church and the community.

Velma took her parents' expectations to heart, and enjoyed showing them her ability and commitment to fulfill those service expectations. In grade school, Velma volunteered to help with any and all artwork, costuming, reciting or piano playing. In middle school her artwork decorated several program stages, and she played the piano at her middle school graduation. In grade school and high school, Velma participated in MPS's all-city choir that performed bi-annually at the Milwaukee Arena.

While At Riverside University High School, Velma became a member of the student council, Spanish club, band, and art club. Simultaneously, as a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Velma became active in the choir, Baptist Youth Fellowship, red circle youth mission, tri-county religious youth council, and the NAACP youth council.

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As civil unrest, civil rights atrocities, discriminatory hiring, and unfair educational and housing practices continued in Milwaukee, civil rights organizations had to step up their game. In 1964 the Milwaukee NAACP youth council participated in a boycott of MPS schools to protest discriminatory busing practices. Local community Baptist, CME, and AME churches allowed their facilities to be used as freedom schools.

That same year, the youth council and its supporters marched in front of the homes of several MPS school board directors to encourage change. In 1965 the youth council and its supporters marched against the Eagles Club, which at that time had an exclusionary clause that barred people of color from joining. Persons of color could rent the Eagles Club hall, but couldn't join the club. In addition, the club had a tax exempt status as a non-profit organization.

In August 1967, under the leadership of Father James Groppi and Alderwoman Vel Phillips (*who sponsored landmark fair housing legislation at the Common Council*), as well as several other unsung heroes, the NAACP youth council marched for 200 straight days in all kinds of weather for fair open housing legislation. The young people were pelted with rocks, eggs, tomatoes and were occasionally tear-gassed to discourage them from marching.

What did Velma have to do with all of this? She was an office holder, serving as the NAACP youth council recording secretary, press secretary, and legislative liaison, representing the youth council with coalition of civil rights or neighborhood self help organizations like Triple O and Northcott Neighborhood House. She served on three national committees for the NAACP, and served as a youth representative to the National Urban Coalition, National Conference of Civil Rights Organizations, and the A. Phillip Randolph Institute.

She also wore out several pairs of shoes marching for civil rights and justice.

As an adult Velma had the opportunity to share her artistic talents as an art teacher and graphic designer, developing logos for countless local businesses, organizations and events. For many years she worked as a Pre-Press Production Artist for the Milwaukee Courier Newspaper and continued to display her love and commitment to the community by working for several community based organizations including the Social Development Commission and Harambee Ombudsman Project.

The following is a brief list of some of Velma's honors and civic involvement:

Center for Teaching Entrepreneurship volunteer of year award; Racine Lake Front Festival Artist award; Garner Foundation Fine Arts award; National Newspaper Publishers Association Typographic and Advertising display award; Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel Student Calendar bronze medalist award; UWM Ad-Hoc African-American Studies Committee; Milwaukee Inner City Arts Council Annual Event Committee; Milwaukee County-wide Title 20 Day Care advisory committee; Gray's Child Development Parent Board; Harambee Community School Parent Board; Harambee Ombudsman Project, Inc. Agency Board of Directors; and the Milwaukee Foundation/Neighborhood and Family Initiative youth advisory committee.

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Velma L. Coggs was very proud of the wide variety of vital contributions her family -- especially her mother, father, grandparents, brothers, sisters, children, uncles, aunts, and cousins -- have made to Milwaukee's African American community.

She leaves to cherish her memory her children, Milele A. Coggs, Oluremi J. Coggs, and her grandchildren, Sharemi, Destiny, and Zariya Coggs, Kayle Phillips, and was preceded in death by Nasir Robbins-Coggs.

The arrangements for Velma L. Coggs are:

- Visitation - Friday, January 7, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., at Northwest Funeral Home, 6630 W. Hampton Ave.
- Funeral Service - Saturday, January 8, at 11:00 a.m., at Calvary Baptist Church, 2959 N. Teutonia Ave.
- Repass - Saturday, January 8, from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., at Wisconsin Black Historical Society, 2620 W. Center St.

The family is requesting that in lieu of flowers people please donate to the Velma & Erma Coggs Scholarship Fund at any TCF Bank.