

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 327

*Celebrating the life of Barbara Ehrenreich.*

Agreed to by the Senate, February 16, 2023  
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2023

WHEREAS, Barbara Ehrenreich of Alexandria, a prolific author and essayist who raised awareness of economic inequality in the United States, died on September 1, 2022; and

WHEREAS, born in Butte, Montana, Barbara Ehrenreich lived in Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, and California in her youth; she earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Reed College and a doctorate in cellular immunology from Rockefeller University; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Ehrenreich coauthored her first book, *Long March, Short Spring: The Student Uprising at Home and Abroad* with her first husband, John, in 1969; the couple followed up with an incisive look at the pharmaceutical industry in 1970 with *The American Health Empire: Power, Profits and Politics*; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1970s, while working as an assistant professor of health sciences at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, Barbara Ehrenreich began lecturing about women's health issues based on her own experiences with substandard conditions at a public health clinic where she gave birth to her first child; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Barbara Ehrenreich left academia to pursue writing as a full-time career and focused her writing on the economic struggles of a declining middle class across the country and ultimately authored more than 20 nonfiction books and one novel; her freelance work appeared in many prominent national publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Magazine*; and

WHEREAS, one of Barbara Ehrenreich's best known works, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, was inspired by a conversation with her editor, Lewis Lapham, at *Harper's Magazine*, in which she wondered how a person could survive while only receiving minimum wage, and he encouraged her to find out; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 1998, Barbara Ehrenreich traveled around the country, working incognito in jobs that paid an average of \$7 an hour, which included working as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, and retail clerk; she often lived paycheck to paycheck and was only able to live in trailer parks or residential motels; and

WHEREAS, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* spurred a national debate on sustainable wages and the plight of working individuals and families living significantly below the poverty level; she further expanded on themes of how economic inequality can exacerbate other forms of social justice with works like *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* in 2005 and *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America* in 2009; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Ehrenreich offered her leadership and expertise to a number of civic organizations supporting women's health, mental health, workers' rights, and social justice advocacy; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, Barbara Ehrenreich published one of her final works, *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer*, which tied together many of the same themes of her earlier works, but was heavily influenced by her own diagnosis with breast cancer and insights on death with dignity; and

WHEREAS, Barbara Ehrenreich will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by her children, Rosa and Ben, and their families; and numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Barbara Ehrenreich, author and passionate advocate for social and economic justice; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Barbara Ehrenreich as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for her memory.

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