

SENATE RESOLUTION No. 116

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 9, 2021

Sponsored by:

Senator THOMAS H. KEAN, JR.

District 21 (Morris, Somerset and Union)

Senator PATRICK J. DIEGNAN, JR.

District 18 (Middlesex)

SYNOPSIS

Honors life and contributions of baseball legend Hank Aaron.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/11/2021)

1 **A SENATE RESOLUTION** honoring the life and contributions of
2 baseball legend Henry “Hank” Louis Aaron.
3
4 **WHEREAS**, Henry Louis Aaron, better known as Hank Aaron, was
5 born on February 5, 1934, in Mobile, Alabama; and
6 **WHEREAS**, With baseball legend Jackie Robinson to look up to as his
7 idol, Aaron used every resource at his disposal to play the game he
8 loved, including practicing with bottlecaps and sticks; and
9 **WHEREAS**, Aaron displayed exemplary skills at a young age and
10 participated in tryouts for several Major League Baseball (MLB)
11 teams, including the Brooklyn Dodgers when he was only 15 years
12 old; and
13 **WHEREAS**, After playing at a high level for several independent and
14 semi-professional teams, Aaron was noticed by a scout for the
15 Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American League in 1951, where
16 his outstanding play in only 26 games earned him multiple contract
17 offers from MLB teams; and
18 **WHEREAS**, In 1952, Aaron’s contract was purchased from the Clowns
19 for \$10,000 by the Boston Braves of the National League, which
20 the Braves’ general manager correctly predicted as a bargain; and
21 **WHEREAS**, After a short stint in the minor leagues, which culminated
22 in Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player (MVP) honors,
23 Aaron was promoted to the major league roster in 1954 and made
24 his MLB debut on April 13, 1954; and
25 **WHEREAS**, Over the next 23 seasons, Aaron was a dominant
26 outfielder, accumulating 3,771 hits, the 1957 MVP Award, three
27 Gold Glove awards, a career .305 batting average, and also holds
28 the MLB records for career runs batted in (RBI), total bases, extra
29 base hits, and all-star game selections; and
30 **WHEREAS**, Despite the numerous records and accolades in Aaron’s
31 career, he is most famous for his chase of Babe Ruth’s career home
32 run record of 714 home runs, overcoming not only the incredible
33 difficulty of reaching the milestone, but doing so in the face of
34 extreme adversity; and
35 **WHEREAS**, For most of his career and even during his post-playing
36 career, Aaron experienced racism and discrimination, including
37 being forced to make his own housing and meal arrangements
38 separate from the rest of the team on road trips and being harassed
39 by fans during games; and
40 **WHEREAS**, Following the 1973 season, Aaron was just two home runs
41 shy of breaking Ruth’s record and received a large assortment of
42 hate mail and death threats during the off-season from people who
43 did not want to see a black man break the near sacrosanct record
44 held by Ruth; and
45 **WHEREAS**, The threats were so widespread that Aaron himself was
46 unsure if he would live to see the 1974 season, and even lead the
47 sports editor of the Atlanta Journal to quietly prepare an obituary
48 for Aaron in the event that he was murdered; and

1 **WHEREAS**, Despite the threats, Aaron continued his quest to break
 2 Ruth’s record, including hitting the record-tying home run in his
 3 first at-bat of the 1974 season; and

4 **WHEREAS**, On April 8, 1974, nearly 20 years after his MLB debut,
 5 Aaron broke Ruth’s record by hitting his 715th career homerun in
 6 the 4th inning, in front of a sold-out crowd in Atlanta and a national
 7 television audience; and

8 **WHEREAS**, The achievement was a monumental moment in MLB and
 9 American history, leading legendary baseball announcer Vin Scully
 10 to state, “A black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep
 11 South for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol.”; and

12 **WHEREAS**, Hank Aaron would end his career with 755 career home
 13 runs and was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and
 14 Museum in his first year of eligibility in 1982 with 97.8 percent of
 15 the vote, second only to Ty Cobb at the time; and

16 **WHEREAS**, Following his hall of fame career, Aaron joined the Braves
 17 organization as a vice president and director of player development,
 18 making him one of the first minorities in MLB upper-level
 19 management; and

20 **WHEREAS**, For his incredible contributions on and off the field,
 21 including a decades-long relationship with the NAACP Legal
 22 Defense Fund, Aaron was awarded both the Presidential Citizens
 23 Medal and Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest
 24 civilian honor; and

25 **WHEREAS**, Aaron was active in his community for most of his life,
 26 including volunteering to publicly receive a COVID-19 vaccination
 27 to demonstrate the safety of the vaccine and encourage Black
 28 Americans to do the same; and

29 **WHEREAS**, Aaron passed away in his sleep from natural causes on
 30 January 22, 2021, just two weeks shy of his 87th birthday; and

31 **WHEREAS**, Therefore, it is appropriate and necessary to honor the life
 32 and contributions of baseball legend Hank Aaron; now, therefore,

33

34 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:*

35

36 1. This House honors the life of Henry “Hank” Louis Aaron,
 37 his legendary 24-year career as a professional baseball player in
 38 both the Negro Leagues and Major League Baseball, and his
 39 incredible contributions on and off-the-field.

40

41 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
 42 shall be transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the
 43 Commissioner of Major League Baseball, the President of the
 44 National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the President of the
 45 Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, and to the family of Henry Louis
 46 Aaron.

STATEMENT

This resolution honors the life and contributions of baseball legend Henry Louis Aaron, better known as Hank Aaron.

Hank Aaron was born in 1934 in Mobile, Alabama. Aaron showcased exceptional talent at a young age, catching the eyes of several scouts. Following his performances on multiple independent and semi-pro teams, Aaron was signed by the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American League.

For three months in 1952, Aaron performed at an incredibly high level with the Clowns, catching the eyes of multiple Major League Baseball (MLB) scouts. In 1952, the Boston Braves of the National League purchased Aaron's contract from the Clowns for \$10,000, in a deal that was considered a steal by the Braves' general manager. For 2 years, Aaron dominated the minor leagues and quickly worked his way up the Braves system. On April 13, 1954, Aaron made his MLB debut.

For 23 years, Aaron was one of the most dominant players in MLB history. He accumulated 3,771 hits, 2,297 RBIs, 25 all-star game appearances, 755 home runs, the 1957 MVP award, and one World Series championship. He still holds several MLB career records. Aaron's dominance led MLB to create the Hank Aaron Award in 1999, awarded annually to the most effective hitter in each league.

Despite Aaron's incredible accomplishments, he, like the other black players in MLB at the time, experienced racism and discrimination. Aaron was forced to arrange his own housing and meal accommodations during Braves' road trips. He consistently received hate mail for his achievement on the field and suffered harassment at the hands of fans during the games.

Aaron's poor treatment was compounded by his chase for Babe Ruth's home run record. Babe Ruth's 714 career home runs was considered a near sacrosanct record. Aaron ended the 1973 season with 713 home runs, two shy of breaking Ruth's record. His off-season consisted of hate mail and death threats, many of which reached the necessary threshold for the FBI to investigate.

On April 8, 1974, Aaron broke Babe Ruth's record when he hit his 715th home run. The moment is most notable for the two college students who rushed the field to congratulate Aaron as he rounded second base, initially startling him. Aaron would end his career with 755 home runs.

Following his retirement, Aaron was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame and joined the Braves as an executive, becoming one of the few minorities in high-level positions. Off-the-field, Aaron contributed to his community in several ways, including his support of the NAACP. Aaron passed away in his sleep from natural causes on January 22, 2021. His legendary career and contributions on and off-the-field deserve recognition and acknowledgement from this State.