

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 358

By Coley

A RESOLUTION to commend Debora Burda Nelson for her honorable and astute service to the people of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to specially recognize those estimable public servants who have dedicated themselves to improving the quality of life for their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, Debora Burda Nelson is one such admirable person who evinces the greatest integrity and probity in all her chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, Debora Nelson was born on December 22, 1950, to Phyllis Blocker Burda and William J. Burda; and

WHEREAS, she is a 1969 graduate of Bettendorf High School in Bettendorf, Iowa, at which she was an active drama student; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Nelson earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1973 from the University of Iowa and her Master of Fine Arts degree in 1993 from the University of Memphis; and

WHEREAS, upon the completion of her bachelor's degree, Debora Nelson taught in Iowa and Texas before moving to Tennessee, where she taught at Tipton-Rosemark Academy until 1983; and

WHEREAS, from 1984-85, she taught English and theatre at Kirby High School and, in 1985, the school's principal, Dr. Snowden "Butch" Carruthers, transferred to Bolton High School and brought Mrs. Nelson to Bolton with him; and

WHEREAS, at Bolton High School, Debora Nelson, who serves as the Fine Arts Chair, and had a vision of implementing art, vocal music, instrumental music, communications, television/film, and theatre into a fine arts secondary school program and, thanks to the leadership of the school's teachers who had previously implemented the fine arts programs,

Mrs. Nelson was able to fine tune her vision of what her theatre program could be, which culminated in the creation of the Bolton StageLight Theatre, which she serves as Director; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure, Mrs. Nelson has expanded the Honorary Thespian Society which, at its beginning, had a charter membership of eleven; Bolton High School's theatre department has grown three times in size and has 150 active theatre students, and she has directed countless notable Bolton StageLight Theatre productions since 1985, including *West Side Story*, *Ten Little Indians*, *Grease*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Guys and Dolls*; and

WHEREAS, Debora Nelson has distinguished herself as a public-spirited citizen of the highest order, graciously donating her time and energies to numerous organizations, including serving as a member of the Shelby County Education Association, the Tennessee Education Association, the National Education Association, and the Memphis Film Institute, and she has served as a liaison for secondary schools, colleges, and universities in the Memphis area; and

WHEREAS, she was also instrumental in the founding of the City of Bartlett Community Theatre, directing a production of *The Sound of Music* in 1982, at which Maria Von Trapp was in attendance, and she later directed other productions for the theatre, such as *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*; and

WHEREAS, when the Bartlett Performing Arts Center was completed in 1999, Mrs. Nelson was chosen to direct the first performance of its inaugural season, for which she again directed *The Sound of Music*, and she continues to serve actively in numerous theatre-related projects throughout Memphis and Shelby County; and

WHEREAS, Debora Nelson is an active and devout member of St. Elisabeth Episcopal Church in Bartlett; and

WHEREAS, she is also deeply devoted to her family and she always endeavors to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, she is perhaps most thankful for the love and support she shares with her husband, John Edward "Jack" Nelson, and their son, Matthew James Nelson, who is a 1996 graduate of Bolton High School and was one of his mother's theatre students, and who now serves as an English and drama teacher and as an Instructional Specialist with Shelby County Schools; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Mrs. Nelson is a 1986 recipient of the University of Memphis Recognition for Exemplary Performance and Achievement in Education award, a 1989 recipient of the State Technical Institute at Memphis Distinguished Teacher Award, and she was a finalist for the Tennessee Teacher of the Year in 1990; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Nelson was inducted into the Tennessee High School Speech and Drama League Hall of Fame in 1999, and she is a 2000 recipient of the WREC Golden Apple Award, and a 2001 recipient of the WKIX 106 Teacher of the Year Award; and

WHEREAS, Debora Nelson plans to retire in May 2011 and, as a tribute to her remarkable thirty-eight-year career as a drama teacher, twenty-six years of which were served estimably at Bolton High School, the Bolton StageLight Theatre will honor her accomplishments in May with a production of *Magic: A Journey Through Time*, which was written and will be directed by Karen Dean, Mrs. Nelson's successor as Director of the Bolton StageLight Theatre; and

WHEREAS, the musical will feature the talents of current theatre students' singing, dancing, and tapping to delightful musical numbers from *West Side Story*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Oklahoma!*, *Footloose*, *Into the Woods*, *High School Musical*, *Anything Goes*, *42nd Street*, *Grease*, *Annie*, and *South Pacific*; and

WHEREAS, there will be five special performances of the musical, which will include specially-featured guest artists who are both current and former Bolton High School students of Mrs. Nelson's; and

WHEREAS, Debora Nelson's remarkable success as a public servant and civic leader is directly attributable to her reliance on the time-honored values of hard work and common sense and her uncommon ability to work well with people from all walks of life; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Nelson is wholly committed to the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the "Volunteer State," and she should be specially recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby commend Debora Burda Nelson for her exceptional service to the good people of Tennessee as an educator of the highest order, salute her professional

expertise and personal excellence, and extend to her our best wishes for every continued success in all her future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.