

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

HOUSE RESOLUTION

POSTHUMOUSLY HONORING THE LEGACY AND LIFE OF ELLISON MYERS
"TARZAN" BROWN, A NATIVE AMERICAN NARRAGANSETT INDIAN WHO TWICE
WON THE BOSTON MARATHON

Introduced By: Representatives Spears, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale, Tanzi,
Fellela, Shallcross Smith, Ajello, Cortvriend, and Kislak

Date Introduced: June 06, 2023

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, Ellison Brown was raised in deep poverty in a two-room shack on the
2 Narragansett Ashaway Reservation in Westerly, the fifth of eight children born to Otis Brown and
3 Grace Ethel Babcock; and

4 WHEREAS, As a member of the Narragansett Indians, and a descendant of the last
5 acknowledged royal family of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island, Mr. Brown's tribal name
6 was "Deerfoot" but as a young boy, he was nicknamed "Tarzan" due to his love of climbing and
7 swinging from the trees like the legendary movie actor, Johnny Weissmuller; and

8 WHEREAS, As a little boy, Mr. Brown began running and in his early teens, he dropped
9 out of school to learn traditional Narragansett stone masonry from his father, as was the
10 Narragansett tradition. Around this time, he met a man who would greatly influence his running
11 career, trainer Thomas "Tip" Salimeno, and shortly thereafter, won his first foot race, a 10-mile
12 event in West Warwick; and

13 WHEREAS, Tarzan, as he became widely known, built his significant strength and honed
14 his athletic build by chopping wood and running whenever and wherever he could. He soon
15 began to win many races around the State, oftentimes barefoot because he couldn't afford running
16 shoes; and

17 WHEREAS, In 1936, in a test of endurance and fortitude that inspired the iconic naming
18 of "Heartbreak Hill" which is a steep, half-mile trek uphill at a 3.3 percent incline, twenty miles
19 into the race, Tarzan won his first Boston Marathon, after breaking his competition on the

1 infamously dreaded portion of the course; and

2 WHEREAS, Over the course of 1936, Tarzan ran numerous additional races, notably
3 winning back-to-back marathons in addition to the Boston Marathon. He also earned the
4 distinction of being the first runner to break the 2:30 mark on the post-1926 Boston course, and
5 for years held the record for best time at all the Boston Marathon's checkpoints; and

6 WHEREAS, Tarzan broke myriad records over the course of his running career and held
7 the record for the fastest time in both the Boston and Lawrence Marathons for many years. He
8 also won three National Championships for shorter races, and won more than two dozen 10 to 16-
9 mile distance races; and

10 WHEREAS, Tarzan earned a place on the 1936 U.S. Olympic team headed for the
11 Olympic Games in Germany. In 1939, he triumphed once again, winning the Boston Marathon
12 stating "I did it for Rhode Island." In 1946, he retired from running; and

13 WHEREAS, Mr. Brown worked as a stonemason and a shell fisherman, but often
14 struggled to find work over the course of his lifetime, and sadly, sold his marathon trophies to
15 help support his family, who to this day, hope to bring his trophies home; and

16 WHEREAS, Ellison "Tarzan" Brown is "Hailed as the 'First 100 Percent American' to
17 Win the Boston Marathon." He left a legacy of triumph and perseverance that is inspiring, and
18 has been celebrated and honored with the annual Tarzan Brown Mystic River Run in Mystic,
19 Connecticut, every year since 1975; now, therefore be it

20 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby
21 posthumously honors the legacy and life of Ellison "Tarzan" Brown; and be it further

22 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
23 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to Ellison Brown, Jr., Ethel May Brown, Marlene
24 Brown-Monroe, and Norman Brown.

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