

**The Council Chambers
City Hall
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

A Proclamation

Whereas: In 2021, Senator Maggie Hassan named Vernis Jackson the Granite Stater of the Month with a commendation read into the Congressional Record that said, “Jackson's work to elevate the stories and culture of African Americans on the Seacoast and around the world represents the best of New Hampshire's efforts to create a more informed, inclusive, and just State that is welcoming of all people and backgrounds. I am honored to recognize her efforts and wish the center continued success;” and

Whereas: Vernis Jackson’s work began soon after she arrived in Portsmouth in 1963 with her husband Emerald, an Air Force doctor stationed at Pease. She co-found Kwanza, Inc. as a chartered community service organization of African American women who raised money for scholarships for African American students and hosted Black art exhibits in visible public space; and

Whereas: She then went on to draw from a diverse group of community organizations already in the Seacoast to form the Seacoast African American Cultural Center in 2000, to secure it a home and to provide leadership in the service of our community with arts and cultural programming and education; and

Whereas: In 2003, following the rediscovery of the burying ground on Chestnut Street, Vernis was called to serve on the African Burying Ground Committee and thereafter to chair it for many years, helping to create the African Burying Ground Memorial Park to stand for those forgotten by bringing together many voices from the community and helping to raise more than \$1 million to realize the vision; and

Whereas: In 2015, the Richmond, Virginia Times Dispatch newspaper wrote about the dedication of our African Burying Ground Memorial Park that it was “embarrassing that a New England city had achieved the sort of commemoration that has evaded Richmond.” Yet recently, almost a decade later, Richmond has finally acknowledged its own historic but abandoned African burying ground; and

Whereas: *All of this cultural investment into the community was accompanied by her 38-year career as a Portsmouth elementary school teacher.*

Now, therefore, I, Deaglan McEachern, Mayor of the City of Portsmouth, on behalf of the members of the City Council and the citizens of Portsmouth, do hereby proclaim November 18, 2024 as

Vernis Jackson Day in Portsmouth

And urge the citizens of Portsmouth to honor her tireless dedication to all members of this community and to ensure that those who so often go forgotten are remembered and celebrated as central to the story of who Portsmouth is today. Let us follow the example she has set, in her words, “There was a void here and, in some kind of way, I helped to fill that void. I am very, very happy about that.”



Given with my hand and the
Seal of the City of Portsmouth,
on this 18th day of November 2024.


Deaglan McEachern, Mayor of Portsmouth