

(H. B. 2988)

(No. 256)

(Approved August 13, 2008)

AN ACT

To direct the Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to name Road PR-9 (Beltway) of Ponce after Rafael (Churumba) Cordero-Santiago.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

Rafael Cordero-Santiago (R.I.P.) was born in the community of Playa de Ponce on October 24, 1942, the day of Saint Raphael, to parents *Don* Bernardino Cordero-Bernard and *Doña* María de los Santos Santiago (both deceased). Cordero-Santiago was married for 33 years to Madeline Velasco-Alvarado, Esq., and fathered two daughters: Mara Bianca and Solange Marie.

Cordero-Santiago attended grade school at the Ramiro Colón and Rafael A. Pujals Schools and junior high at the McKinley School, and graduated from the Ponce High School. Between 1960 and 1964, he pursued studies at the now called Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, from which he obtained a Bachelor's degree in Arts majoring in Political Sciences, Economics, and Social Sciences.

From 1964 to 1968, Cordero-Santiago worked for the Department of Commerce of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In 1975, he retired from active politics in order to work for the private business sector. He returned to politics from 1981 to 1984 as Presidential Delegate of then Popular Party President, Rafael Hernández-Colón, Esq.

In March, 1985, he was appointed Administrator of the Right to Work Administration. During his tenure, this government agency received various acknowledgments. On December 31, 1987, he resigned the said office to launch his official candidacy for Mayor of the city of Ponce for the Popular Democratic Party, for which office he was elected. From that time onward, he was reelected to the first municipal executive office by very ample electoral margins. He served as Mayor of Ponce for fifteen (15) years.

Mayor Cordero-Santiago was able to turn Ponce into the first Autonomous Municipality of Puerto Rico on October 27, 1992. Since that time, he developed new strategies so as to strengthen municipal finances and prevent the municipality from being dependent upon the Central Government. He also promoted and completed the comprehensive review of the Territorial Ordinance Plan of Ponce by late 2002.

Cordero-Santiago advocated for the creation of other zones or poles for economic development at the Eastern, Western, and Northwestern regions of Puerto Rico, so as to achieve a better distribution of wealth and greater equality in the distribution of public funds in the Island. He also established in the Recycling Program in the Municipality of Ponce, as required by law.

Mayor Cordero-Santiago's administration consistently defended the vested rights of its constituents. Ponce has been the first municipality that took the Central Government to Court in dozens of cases and has obtained, up to now, significant results for all Ponce residents. Two rulings, which have been enacted into law, are most noteworthy: in one, the Puerto Rico Supreme Court rules for the validity of delegation agreements executed by and between the Municipality and the Central Government; in the other, a ruling was delivered to public corporations and instrumentalities under the Territorial Ordinance Plan of the Municipality.

Cordero-Santiago was able to effect significant changes in the Historic Zone, the suburbs, the public housing projects, the neighborhoods, and the rural areas. His constant efforts in defense of the citizens earned him acknowledgments both at the local and the international levels. Among these could be mentioned:

- **“Excelencia en el Servicio Público”** [lit.: Excellence in Public Service], awarded by the Chamber of Commerce of Puerto Rico in 1986.
- **“Servidor Público Distinguido”** [lit: Distinguished Public Official], conferred by the Chamber of Commerce of Ponce and South of Puerto Rico in 1987.
- Featured in the publication *Who is who in America* in 1990.
- **“Servidor Público por Excelencia”** [lit: Public Official par Excellence], an acknowledgment from the Puerto Rico Homebuilders’ Association in 1991.
- **Juan Luis Boscio Deprés Award**, for excellence in public service, conferred by the Chamber of Commerce of Ponce and South of Puerto Rico in 1992.
- Acknowledgments such as the **“El mayor defensor de la Reforma Municipal”** [lit.: Municipal Reform’s Greatest Advocate] (Autonomous Municipalities) in 1992.
- A special acknowledgment for his contribution to the Inter-University Athletic League (LAI, Spanish acronym) Games and to Puerto Rican youth in 1994.
- Elected by the Puerto Rico Mayors’ Association as **“Ejecutivo del Año”** [lit: Executive Official of the Year] for his advocacy of and solidarity with the rights of the Municipalities of Puerto Rico in 1994.

- Featured in the publication *Who is Who Among Hispanic Americans* in 1994.

- Selected as “**Ejecutivo Distinguido en el Área de Servicio**” [lit.: Distinguished Executive Official in the Service Field] by the Sales and Marketing Association of Ponce and the South in 1996.

To these distinctions, we must add numerous acknowledgments from cultural, sports, recreational, community, pedagogical, commercial, and banking associations.

In the area of culture, the rescue of the historical values of the city, and community and infrastructure services, the following achievements are most notable:

- In 1990, 1991, and 1992, the Department of Social Services confers to Ponce the first award for “**Calidad de vida, en la categoría de Ciudad Grande**” [lit: Quality of Life, in the Big City Category]. In 2000, such award was further validated, for Ponce was conferred the **Rafael Carrión Award**, for being the cleanliest city in Puerto Rico, in the A Category.

- In 1995, the Dora Colón Clavell Urban Park received the award “**Obra Sobresaliente del Año**” [lit: Outstanding Construction Work of the Year] from the College of Engineers and Surveyors of Puerto Rico.

- Other acknowledgments in professional journals, such as *Engineering News*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and *National Trust for Historic Preservation*.

- Ponce was included into the European Modernism Route on occasion of the centennial of such artistic movement, which earned Ponce a recommendation from the magazine *Coup de foucet* of Barcelona as one of the cities worth visiting.

- The first theme museum about the history of a town in Puerto Rico was founded: *Museo de la Historia de Ponce* [lit: Museum of the History of Ponce].

- Ponce is the municipality which has been most consistent in documenting its historic-cultural progress, through the periodical publication of books. These are:

- *Renacimiento de una valiosa herencia*

- *Ponce, el Teatro La Perla y la Campana de la Almudaina*

- *Memorias de los XVII Juegos Deportivos Centroamericanos y del Caribe 1993*

- *Catálogo del Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Tibes*

- *Breviario sobre la Historia de Ponce*

- *Ponce en su historia moderna, 1945-2002*

- *Luis Torres Nadal: Teatro y Poesía, 2003*

- *Pedro Albizu Campos, estudiante en Ponce: nuevas revelaciones, 2004*

- From 1991, the Historical Archive of the Municipality of Ponce has achieved status as the best of its kind in Puerto Rico by implementing the origination system, whose fundamental principle is to follow in order the origin of the document created.

- Digital Education Center, inaugurated in November, 2003, located at the facilities of the Historical Archive of the Municipality of Ponce, a place where students are given the opportunity to access information on the web free of charge.

- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development bestowed on the Municipal Administration of Ponce the John J. Gunther Award for the following projects:

- *La Guancha Recreational and Cultural Complex*
- *Housing Developments in Barrio San Antón*
- *Fishing Village*
- *CODEPCOVI, as a facilitator for the construction of affordable housing*

The administrative and fiscal operations and the municipal administration of Ponce have earned this municipality a ninety-nine (99) point rating in 2000, and a 100 point rating in 2001 and 2002 from the Office of the Comptroller of Puerto Rico.

The accounting operations and the financial report of the municipal administration of Ponce corresponding to fiscal year 2001-2002 were acknowledged by the award of the Certificate of Achievement of Excellence in Financial Reporting, conferred by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. This is the highest honor in the government accounting field.

One of the feats that would elevate him to the rank of undisputed national leader was his fight in defense of his fellow Puerto Ricans of Vieques when he entered the lands occupied by the United States Navy in Vieques in August, 2001. Together with hundreds of Puerto Ricans, he was arrested and prosecuted under civil disobedience charges. He served time for thirty (30) days at the Puerto Rico Federal Court. On August 29, 2001, upon his release from prison, he returned to his town of Ponce, where the people gave him an overwhelming welcome.

The sense of national mourning for this unexpected event has been the most heartfelt expression seen in Puerto Rico in recent times. He shall thus remain for us, for the people of Ponce and for posterity as “the perpetual Mayor” and for history, as “the perpetual Mayor” of his city of Ponce.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.—To direct the Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to name Road PR-9 (Beltway) of Ponce after Rafael (Churumba) Cordero-Santiago, without being subject to the provisions of Act No. 99 of June 22, 1961, as amended.

Section 2.—Upon approval, the Department of State shall notify the Highways and Transportation Authority, in order for the pertinent administrative procedures to be conducted.

Section 3.—This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 256 (H. B. 2988)** of the **7th Session of the 15th Legislature** of Puerto Rico:

AN ACT to direct the Public Structure and Highway Naming Commission of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to name Road PR-9 (Beltway) of Ponce after Rafael (Churumba) Cordero-Santiago.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the 1st day of February of 2010.

Solange I. De Lahongrais, Esq.
Director