

Senate Resolution 486

By: Senators Jones of the 10th, Strickland of the 17th and Williams of the 25th

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and memory of Jama Hedgecoth; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, the State of Georgia mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished citizens
3 with the passing of Jama Hedgecoth on November 20, 2023; and

4 WHEREAS, on February 13, 1958, the world welcomed a force of compassion and change.
5 Jama Hedgecoth, a beacon of love and a fervent advocate for both humans and animals, left
6 an indelible mark on the world during her journey through life; and

7 WHEREAS, she spent most of her childhood driving around the country with her
8 evangelistic parents and three siblings, sharing the gospel at various churches and tent
9 revivals. It was clear she was an avid animal lover from a very early age as she would
10 eagerly ask her parents to visit the zoo every time they pulled into a new town. The answer
11 was always the same: no, they couldn't afford it; and

12 WHEREAS, she saw many animals in need, from sickly stray pets abandoned in city parking
13 lots to injured, orphaned wildlife on the sides of country roads. Determined to help them,
14 Jama began sneaking creatures of all types into the family's motel rooms where she would
15 tend to their wounds and nurture them back to health. This habit wasn't appreciated by her

16 family, who were frequently kicked out of their motel room and forced to sleep in the car
17 when management would discover Jama's uninvited guests crawling and climbing around the
18 motel room; and

19 WHEREAS, when her parents finally became fed up and demanded that their youngest
20 daughter stop taking in animals, Jama boldly told them that one day she would have her own
21 place where she could take in any animal that needed her help and that she would let people
22 come visit those animals for free so everyone could enjoy them even if they had no money;
23 and

24 WHEREAS, she founded an animal sanctuary named Noah's Ark in Ellenwood in 1978. The
25 sanctuary was so named because it was a vessel of safety for children and animals against
26 today's floods of abuse and neglect; and

27 WHEREAS, Jama and her young family soon outgrew their original location and moved
28 Noah's Ark to its current 250 acre site in Locust Grove in 1990, providing care to animals
29 of all types and joy to its many visitors; and

30 WHEREAS, in 1990 Noah's Ark became a fully licensed nonprofit organization that would
31 go on to become one of the country's largest and most well-respected animal sanctuaries
32 based on the outstanding care the Hedgecoth Family provided to their rescued animal
33 residents. At the same time, Noah's Ark Children's Care Home continued to grow in size and
34 complexity, accepting more and more challenging children and providing refuge to over 400
35 foster children by the time the group home closed years later; and

36 WHEREAS, Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary continued to improve and expand until it reached
37 international fame when a young bear, lion, and tiger were rescued from a criminal's

38 basement in Atlanta, Georgia, and placed in the Hedgecoth family's care in 2001. Nicknamed
39 "BLT" for bear-lion-tiger, Baloo the bear, Leo the lion, and Shere Khan the tiger eventually
40 healed from their injuries and from the trauma of their abusive past. Bonded through the
41 suffering they endured early in life and not seeing one another as anything but a sibling, as
42 "The BLT" lived peacefully together for the rest of their lives while garnering supporters
43 from around the world; and

44 WHEREAS, Baloo, Leo and Shere Khan went on to live out the rest of their lives with
45 dignity and peace in a beautiful natural habitat built for them at Noah's Ark where at no
46 charge guests could observe and learn about the unlikely trio of brothers and apply that
47 knowledge to their own lives: If a bear, a lion, and a tiger can live together in harmony
48 without harming one another, surely humans can do better than what we have. Thousands
49 of other animals, and even people, share a story like that of the BLT: they were once lost or
50 broken but after finding their way to Jama's Noah's Ark, they were found and made whole
51 again; and

52 WHEREAS, Jama Hedgecoth had a heart for creating positive change in the world around
53 her. Her faith was the cornerstone of her life, illuminating her path and guiding her actions
54 with love, grace, and, most prominently of all, a profound sense of purpose. Jama received
55 a vast array of accolades for her most notable contribution to the State of Georgia: founding
56 Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary and Children's Care Home. Some of her awards include the
57 Greater Atlanta Veterinary Medical Society's Humanitarian of the Year Award, Mutual of
58 Omaha's Wildlife Heritage Center Award of Excellence, Henry County Chamber of
59 Commerce Woman of Substance Award, TBS Pathfinders Leadership Award, American
60 Family Coalition's Parent of the Year Award, Aurea McGarry's Inaugural Living Legend
61 Award, Turknett Leadership Group Leadership Character Award Nominee, Positive
62 Thinking Foundation's America Award for Personifying the American Character & Spirit,

63 Tommy Nobis Center's Galaxy of Stars Community Champion Award, and Eureka
64 Communities Award for Exemplary Service; and

65 WHEREAS, during her career Jama became an Honored Member of the US Registry's
66 "Who's Who" Among Outstanding Americans and received Proclamations of Honor from
67 the City of Locust Grove and the Henry County Board of Commissioners; and

68 WHEREAS, Jama was honored to receive Certificates of Appreciation from many
69 organizations whose causes she deeply admired, including the Georgia War Veteran's Home,
70 Operation Iraqi Freedom's 184th Ordnance Battalion (EOD), the Warrior Transition Battalion
71 of Fort Benning,, Henry County School System for Work Based Learning Program,
72 International Fraternity of Delta Sigma Pi, and Griffin Power Systems Wildlife Habitat and
73 Nature Trail. As a certified wildlife rehabilitator, Georgia's wild animals always held a
74 special place in her heart; and

75 WHEREAS, in remembering Jama Hedgecoth, we honor a remarkable woman whose
76 indomitable spirit touched the lives of many, leaving an enduring legacy of love, compassion,
77 and faith. Through her visionary leadership, Noah's Ark became a haven for hundreds of
78 children and thousands of animals--a testament to her boundless compassion and
79 commitment to making a difference. Jama Hedgecoth will long be remembered for her love
80 of family, friendship, and community and will be missed by all who had the great fortune of
81 knowing her.

82 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
83 join in honoring the life and memory of Jama Hedgecoth and express their deepest and most
84 sincere regret at her passing.

85 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
86 to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to the family of Jama
87 Hedgecoth.