

The Black AIDS Institute (BAI) mourns the passing of Mrs. Ina A. Wilson, BAI's founder, Phill Wilson, mother. Mrs. Wilson passed away on her 85th birthday in her Chicago home.

BAI's President & CEO, Raniyah Copeland, said, "Mrs. Wilson has been a constant fixture of support and love at BAI. She emulated the power of a Black mother's unconditional love. Her regular presence at BAI was a model of how critical the support of family is in our efforts to end HIV."

Mrs. Wilson attended every BAI Heroes in the Struggle gala for the past 20 years and modeled what unconditional love looked like. She never wavered in her support of Phill in 40+ years of him being openly gay and living with HIV. She did local and national media encouraging Black families to have open communication, particularly as it related to HIV and sexuality. Born in McComb Mississippi in 1935, she bucked norms and was an outspoken HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ advocate. She often spoke about the importance of Black parents supporting, embracing their children unconditionally. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were featured with BAI's founder in the CDC's 'Let's Stop HIV Together' national campaign to raise awareness around HIV and AIDS, particularly in Black families and communities.

BAI Board Chair, Grazell R. Howard, JD says, "When I reflect on Mrs. Ina Wilson, 'Mom', I think of a lighthouse. Always present, solid and statuesque, with a beaming light regardless of the elements. Gracefully, providing unconditional love, steadfast commitment and constant dedication to her family and the Black AIDS Institute. I will miss her face, while knowing she will live forever in our hearts. May Joy return to all, in the memories of our ancestors."

An activist in her own right, Mrs. Wilson was a significant leader and community organizer in the Chicago community—advising and challenging alderman, the mayor, and county officials to deliver services and programs to the community. Often called the mayor of Bronzeville, she was instrumental in the revitalization of the Bronzeville neighborhood, one of the historic Black communities on the near southside of Chicago. One of her primary passions was moving community activism to the voting booth and the chambers of power on local, state, and national levels. When Barack Obama was considering a run for the U.S. Senate, one of his exploratory stops was Mrs. Wilson's basement to meet with community members. Mrs. Wilson also understood the importance of economic empowerment. As one of the first Black female Assistant Vice President at the First National Bank of Chicago. She was actively involved in Black financial literacy. She was also an entrepreneur in her own right, co-owning a beauty salon with her daughter, trucking company with her husband, and investing in a Black giftware manufacturing company owned by her son.

"My mom was definitely a renaissance woman." said Phill Wilson. She touched so many people in so many ways. She modeled what it meant to be strong, focused, determined and loving. She taught me how important it was to not just care about people, but what a privilege and gift it was to make a difference. For example, I am a testament of what is possible when Black children, LGBTQI children, children living with HIV/AIDS, or any child has the love and support they deserve and need.

I think the most the most fitting tribute to my mother is something she said to me the night my grandfather died. My mom said, "Don't cry for big daddy. He lived a long life. He made a

difference.” That is exactly what I would say about my mom. She lived a long life. She made a difference. If someone wants to honor my mom, don’t cry, vote!”

In memory of Mrs. Ina A. Wilson, the family is asking for donations to be made in her name to the Black AIDS Institute and for everyone who knew her, knew of her, and or loved her to make sure they vote in the upcoming elections.

Her legacy lives on through the countless lives she inspired.