

1 [Margo St. James Day - February 14, 2021]

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3 **Resolution celebrating the life of Margo St. James and declaring February 14, 2021, as**
4 **Margo St. James Day in the City and County of San Francisco.**

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6 WHEREAS, San Francisco, and the world, lost a giant when feminist revolutionary,
7 proud prostitute, and pioneer of the sex worker movement Margo St. James died on January
8 11, 2021; and

9 WHEREAS, Margo was born Margaret St. James on September 12, 1937, in
10 Bellingham, Washington, where she lived until moving to San Francisco in 1958 to pursue her
11 career as an artist; and

12 WHEREAS, Upon arriving in San Francisco, Margo joined and became a fixture in the
13 City's counterculture movements of the 1960s, first settling in North Beach where she joined
14 the Beatnik scene and then living in the Haight-Ashbury where she hosted such figures as
15 musician Frank Zappa, novelist Ken Kesey, and Yippie founder Paul Krassner; and

16 WHEREAS, In 1962, Margo was arrested on false charges of prostitution and
17 convicted, as she once wisely put it, for the crime of knowing too much to be a nice girl; and

18 WHEREAS, Margo's conviction inspired her to enroll in law school and, although she
19 never completed her law degree, her studies prepared her to successfully appeal her
20 conviction; and

21 WHEREAS, Although Margo's 647.b conviction made it difficult to find work, she found
22 employment delivering summonses for famed criminal defense attorney Vincent Hallinan
23 before later becoming one of California's first women private detectives, building ties with the
24 San Francisco defense bar and quickly growing her network of powerful political contacts and
25 decades-long relationships that would help her propel the sex worker movement forward; and

1 WHEREAS, In 1973, Margo founded COYOTE, short for Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics,
2 the first organization dedicated to sex worker rights in the United States; and

3 WHEREAS, For decades, COYOTE offered legal assistance to sex workers,
4 successfully fought to overturn City policies requiring non-consensual STI testing and
5 quarantines for arrested sex workers and the use of condoms as criminal evidence, and led
6 an international movement to decriminalize sex work, making visible for the first time the
7 victimization of sex workers; and

8 WHEREAS, From 1974 to 1979, COYOTE published a newsletter, “COYOTE
9 HOWLS,” which featured national and international news on sex work, first-hand accounts of
10 abuses faced by sex workers, feminist theory and research on sex work and poetry by sex
11 workers; the newsletter’s mailing list exceeded 60,000 people; COYOTE solicited art work to
12 spice up the newsletter from cartoonists Robert Crumb and Trina Robbins, and ran ads for
13 COYOTE t-shirts, posters and the legendary Hooker’s Ball; and

14 WHEREAS, Margo produced the legendary Hooker’s Ball, which was remembered by
15 many attendees as an “only in San Francisco” occasion, where lines of limousines and Rolls
16 Royces delivered glammed up sex workers, pimps, politicians, police and everyone in
17 between; at its height in 1978, 20,000 attendees flocked to the Cow Palace for the Hooker’s
18 Ball, grossing over \$200,000 to help fund staff to carry out COYOTE’s mission; Margo
19 famously made her entrance that year on the back of Margie the Elephant, and Prince
20 Charles and then-SFPD Chief Charles Gain were in attendance; and

21 WHEREAS, Margo brought COYOTE around the country, attending major women’s
22 conferences to recruit more foot soldiers in the movement for decriminalization of the world’s
23 oldest profession, testifying in front of governments everywhere, lecturing audiences across
24 the country and around the world, and fearlessly pushing decriminalization onto the political
25 agenda; and

1 WHEREAS, COYOTE filed a 1976 lawsuit in Rhode Island seeking to decriminalize sex
2 work there, advised candidates for public office embracing COYOTE’s work and pledging to
3 introduce decriminalization bills if elected, and went on to receive government grants and
4 private funding to support their work; and

5 WHEREAS, In 1982, as Margo was contemplating plans to take the movement
6 international, she met Gail Pheterson, and soon after the two moved to Europe where they
7 would live for ten years in the Netherlands and southern France; together with the COYOTE
8 network Margo and Gail organized the Women’s Forum on Prostitutes’ Rights and the
9 COYOTE Convention, as well as the First World Whore’s Congress in Amsterdam in 1985
10 and the Second World Whores’ Congress in Brussels in 1986 which were attended by sex
11 workers from 18 countries, held at the height of the AIDS epidemic when sex workers were
12 desperate to protect themselves and their livelihoods; and

13 WHEREAS, In the early 1990s, Margo’s friend, Chronicle crime reporter Paul Avery,
14 proposed that the two get married so that Margo could access Paul’s health care benefits and
15 help take care of Paul who was suffering from emphysema; the two were married on
16 Valentine’s Day in 1992 at Malvina’s Cafe in North Beach, and Margo returned to the States
17 for good in November 1993; and

18 WHEREAS, In 1994, Margo was appointed to the San Francisco Task Force on
19 Prostitution created by Supervisor Terrence Hallinan; there Margo met Carol Stuart, then an
20 aide in the California State Legislature, who encouraged her to run for public office to build
21 political and public support for the movement; and

22 WHEREAS, In 1996 Margo ran for one of six open seats on the Board of Supervisors
23 with Carol as her campaign manager, running on the famous slogan “The Lady Is a ...
24 Champ;” Margo came in seventh in a field of 28 candidates with 69,000 City-wide votes and
25 endorsements from Mayor Willie Brown and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, among others; and

1 WHEREAS, In 1999, Margo and her closest comrades, including Carol Stuart and
2 Exotic Dancers Alliance co-founders Johanna Breyer and Dawn Passar, set out to create the
3 world’s first health clinic for sex workers, based in large part on empirical evidence presented
4 by participants at the two World Whores Congresses and the blueprint for a peer-based health
5 initiative written by Priscilla Alexander, who had been Margo’s trusted assistant in the 1970’s
6 and 80s; and

7 WHEREAS, In June of 1999, St. James Infirmary first opened its doors, as a “pop-up
8 clinic” within the San Francisco City Clinic, providing free primary care, STI testing, peer
9 counseling, case management, free food, acupuncture, and massage therapy to its sex
10 worker clients; and

11 WHEREAS, St. James Infirmary is the world’s first peer-based non-profit occupational
12 health and safety clinic for sex workers, and continues to serve current and former sex
13 workers of all genders and sexual orientations, their current partner(s), and their children
14 who live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area; and

15 WHEREAS, Margo devoted her life to exposing the hypocrisy of laws against sex work
16 and the stigmatization of women who defy patriarchal standards of the “good girl”; and

17 WHEREAS, Margo was a relentless and fearless organizer for the legal rights, health
18 care, financial security, and dignity of sex workers everywhere; and

19 WHEREAS, Margo built alliances among women to bridge the structural and societal
20 divisions designed to prevent women from building collective power; and

21 WHEREAS, Margo is also remembered as a field nurse, an abortionist, a midwife, and
22 a proud unionist (never management, as she often liked to say); and

23 WHEREAS, Margo touched countless lives and made the world a safer place for
24 women and sex workers everywhere - a contribution deserving of the highest recognition and
25 honor from the City and County of San Francisco; now, therefore, be it

1 RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors declares February 14,
2 2021, as Margo St. James Day in the City and County of San Francisco.

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