

A JOINT MEMORIAL
EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCE OF THE LEGISLATURE UPON THE PASSING
OF LOUIS RICHARD ROCCO.

WHEREAS, Louis Richard Rocco was born on November 19, 1938 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The firstborn of eight siblings, he grew up in rough and poor surroundings in the valley; and

WHEREAS, he had a very eventful life, and in 1974, he became a "south valley hero"; and

WHEREAS, his parents signed a waiver so that he could join the United States army at the age of seventeen, and the military became his career. Eventually, he retired after twenty-two years as chief warrant officer and after serving two tours of duty in Vietnam, in 1965 through 1966 and again in 1969 through 1970, and another tour of duty during operation desert storm in 1991 through 1992; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Warrant Officer Louis Richard Rocco received the congressional medal of honor from President Gerald R. Ford, the first medal of honor presented by President Ford to a living Hispanic soldier for "unparalleled bravery in the face of enemy fire and his performance far above and beyond the call of duty"; and

WHEREAS, he was awarded that medal for his act of bravery in South Vietnam, when he volunteered to assist a

medical team whose mission it was to evacuate eight severely wounded soldiers, and, under intense enemy fire and disregarding his own safety, he identified and placed accurate suppressive fire on the enemy as the rescue aircraft descended toward the landing zone. The team's helicopter crashed, but Rocco rescued his comrades, carrying them to safety through twenty meters of hostile enemy fire; and

WHEREAS, he himself was severely wounded, suffering burns over most of his body, a fractured wrist and hip and a severely bruised back, and it was two days before rescuers were able to land and take the survivors in for medical help; and

WHEREAS, medal of honor recipients are humbled by the realization that they are symbolizing many, many brave soldiers who make uncommon sacrifices on the field of battle, and Rocco's personal condition for accepting the honor was that he would spend the rest of his life and energy helping those veterans and their children who were less fortunate than he; and

WHEREAS, he kept his promise by returning to New Mexico, where he became a constant, positive force in the lives of troubled veterans in the years following the war; and from Costilla to Las Cruces, many New Mexico veterans were in some way touched or helped by Louis Richard Rocco; and

WHEREAS, Louis Richard Rocco was the first Hispanic

Vietnam veteran appointed to serve as director of the New Mexico veterans' service commission; and

WHEREAS, he established the New Mexico Vietnam veterans outreach center, helped pass laws enabling veterans to attend state schools without having to pay for tuition or books, requested that veterans centers come into New Mexico and service our veterans, helped acquire Tingley hospital in Truth or Consequences and turned it into an assisted-living and nursing home for veterans, and established "vet help" for homeless veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, Louis Richard's own life experiences gave him the patience and wisdom to be a "big brother" and to show concern for youths who were experiencing what he had been through as a youngster on the streets and in gangs and to encourage them to take a better road than the one he had traveled in his youth;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that condolences be extended to the family and friends of Louis Richard Rocco, a loving and devoted New Mexican who, before he died of cancer on October 31, 2002, fulfilled his promise to dedicate his life to helping veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, if a state park is designated in Angel Fire, it be named the Louis Richard Rocco state park.