



## 2017 SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 7

February 6, 2017 - Introduced by Senators L. TAYLOR and JOHNSON, cosponsored by Representatives YOUNG, FIELDS, BOWEN and CROWLEY. Referred to Committee on Senate Organization.

1     **Relating to:** proclaiming February 2017 as Black History Month.

2             Whereas, Americans have recognized black history annually since 1926, first  
3 as “Negro History Week” and later as “Black History Month”; and

4             Whereas, we are commemorating the 51st anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights  
5 Act, which drew from many African Americans taking a positive stance on breaking  
6 down the barriers to racial equality; and

7             Whereas, African Americans in Wisconsin have made and continue to make  
8 outstanding contributions to our communities, and it is important to recognize the  
9 work of these leaders to combat negative stereotypes; and

10            Whereas, Ezekiel Gillespie, born in Tennessee as a slave, purchased his  
11 freedom to go north; Ezekiel sold groceries and operated a local branch of the  
12 Underground Railroad, helping hundreds of African Americans escape slavery; and

13            Whereas, Ezekiel Gillespie tied faith to the African-American community; he  
14 helped open Wisconsin’s first black church; and

1           Whereas, Ezekiel Gillespie also led the charge for African-American suffrage  
2 when, in 1865, Ezekiel attempted to vote and was denied a ballot, and Ezekiel went  
3 on to sue for his right to vote in *Gillespie v. Palmer*, which led to the Wisconsin  
4 Supreme Court enforcing the 1849 referendum in favor of African-American male  
5 suffrage; and

6           Whereas, Clayborn Benson, a native of Milwaukee, faced many challenges as  
7 an impoverished youth of color; he graduated from the old West Division High School  
8 despite being labeled “learning disabled;” he became the founder and executive  
9 director of the Black Historical Society and Museum, which documents and  
10 preserves the historical heritage of people of African descent in Wisconsin; and

11           Whereas, James Hightower III, on June 15, 2013, at the age of 12, became the  
12 youngest African American in American history to earn the honor of Eagle Scout,  
13 scouting’s highest honor; James Hightower III, for his Eagle Scout service project,  
14 rebuilt six bleachers at the three baseball fields of Kletzsch Park and led recruitment  
15 and fundraising efforts for this massive undertaking that enriched the Glendale and  
16 Milwaukee communities; and

17           Whereas, James Hightower III is an inspiration for children and adults in  
18 Milwaukee and throughout Wisconsin for his commitment to bettering communities;  
19 and

20           Whereas, Judge Vel Phillips, in the 1970s, became the first African American  
21 to serve in the judiciary in the state of Wisconsin, the first woman to serve as a judge  
22 in Milwaukee County, and was both the first African American and first woman  
23 elected to a statewide office; and

24           Whereas, Shanyeill McCloud founded Clean Slate Milwaukee to end  
25 discrimination by promoting equal access and opportunity for employment, housing,

1 and higher education for men and women with nonviolent criminal backgrounds;  
2 and

3 Whereas, Keith McQuirter, award winning documentarian, produced  
4 Milwaukee 53206, which tells the story of those affected by mass incarceration in  
5 America's most incarcerated zip code; and

6 Whereas, Eric Von, who tragically passed away in 2016, served as a tremendous  
7 voice for Milwaukee as host of "Precious Lives" on WUWM radio, WNOV's "The  
8 Voice," and co-host of "Black Nouveau" and "Interchange" on Milwaukee Public  
9 Television; and

10 Whereas, Thelmas Sias, who retired as a high-profile executive early this past  
11 January, has given years of service to the Milwaukee community as a mentor on how  
12 to challenge and fight through adversity; and

13 Whereas, Marcia P. Coggs was the first American Democratic politician who  
14 served Milwaukee in the Wisconsin State Assembly from 1977-1993; and

15 Whereas, Lloyd A. Barbee won a major civil rights lawsuit in 1972 that resulted  
16 in Milwaukee becoming one of the first major Northern cities to integrate its public  
17 schools; and

18 Whereas, Marlene Johnson-Odom, Common Council member from 1980-2004,  
19 making her the longest-serving female Council member to date, sponsored the  
20 renaming of N. 3rd St. to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and the creation of  
21 Milwaukee's Minority Business Enterprise Program and championed developments  
22 throughout her district, particularly in Brewers Hill; and

23 Whereas, Dr. James Cameron, only known survivor of an attempted lynching,  
24 imprisoned for five years following his lynching but eventually officially pardoned  
25 by the State of Indiana, founded three NAACP chapters and America's Black

1 Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, as well as authoring his autobiography, “A Time  
2 of Terror”; and

3 Whereas, Former Representative Tamara Grigsby was a dedicated public  
4 servant who dedicated herself to improving the lives of children, including  
5 championing the creation of the Department of Children and Families and the  
6 YoungStar Program; and

7 Whereas, many African Americans have served in the legislature, including  
8 former senators Spencer Coggs, Gary George, Gwendolynne Moore, and Monroe  
9 Swan and former representatives Lloyd Barbee, Cecil B. Brown Jr., Elizabeth Coggs,  
10 Marcia P. Coggs, Isaac Coggs, Tamara Grigsby, Raymond Lee Lathan, Johnnie  
11 Morris-Tatum, Lucien Palmer, Antonio Riley, Le Roy Simmons, Walton Bryan  
12 Stewart, Barbara Toles, and Robert Turner; and

13 Whereas, these individuals were able to achieve these deeds only because of the  
14 social movement towards racial equality in the past decades; and

15 Whereas, because incidents of racism still exist today, it is in the public interest  
16 to continue to advocate for full inclusion and equality for individuals of color; now,  
17 therefore, be it

18 ***Resolved by the senate, the assembly concurring, That*** the Wisconsin  
19 legislature recognizes February 2017 as Black History Month and extends thanks  
20 and praise to the above-named persons for their contributions to the state of  
21 Wisconsin and their fellow citizens.

22 (END)