

State of Wisconsin



2017 Senate Joint Resolution 7

ENROLLED JOINT RESOLUTION

Relating to: proclaiming February 2017 as Black History Month.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas, Shanyeill McCloud founded Clean Slate Milwaukee to end discrimination by promoting equal access and opportunity for employment, housing, and higher education for men and women with nonviolent criminal backgrounds; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas, Dr. James Cameron, only known survivor of an attempted lynching, imprisoned for five years following his lynching but eventually officially pardoned by the State of Indiana, founded three NAACP chapters and America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, as well as authoring his autobiography, "A Time of Terror"; and

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

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

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

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

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

Representative Robin J. Vos
Speaker of the Assembly

Senator Roger Roth
President of the Senate

Date

Jeffrey Renk
Senate Chief Clerk