



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 6, 2020

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring Jesse White

WHEREAS, the concept of creating Black History Month can be traced back to 1915, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson traveled to Illinois to participate in the 50th anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ending slavery. Dr. Woodson was among many that participated as an exhibitor during the three-week celebration. Witnessing the interest, curiosity, and demand for knowledge, Dr. Woodson decided to form an organization whose undertaking would be to encourage the study of Black history and life. Thus, on September 9, 1915, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) was formed; and

WHEREAS, the first official celebration was held in February 1926 and was known as Negro History Week. The second week of February was chosen, as this week encompassed the birthdays of two notable figures in Black history: Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and Frederick Douglass, who was an escaped slave and devoted abolitionist; and

WHEREAS, in the 1920's, the ASNLH began creating an annual theme for Negro History Week and in 1937 the Negro History Bulletin was established to promote the annual theme and create a venue for circulating information about Negro History Week on a larger scale; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960's, with the increasing momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, the popularity of Negro History Week exploded. In many places, including college campuses, instead of celebrating Negro History Week, many students were celebrating Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, President Gerald R. Ford became the first president to recognize Black History Week in 1975. He issued a "Message on the Observance of Black History Week" and encouraged Americans to "recognize the important contribution made to our nation's life and culture by black citizens"; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Black History Week was officially converted into Black History Month. In commemoration of this celebration, President Ford issued the first "Message on the Observance of Black History Month"; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, designating February 1986 as “National Black (Afro-American) History Month”. There have also been a multitude of Presidential Proclamations issued in recognition of Black History Month. Since 1996, a Presidential Proclamation has been issued each year; and

WHEREAS, the transformation from a weeklong observance to a month was a major accomplishment for the ASNLH (now Association for the Study of African American Life and History). The move to a month-long celebration captured Dr. Woodson’s long held belief that Black history should not just be acknowledged one week out of the year, but instead deserved much broader celebration and recognition; and

WHEREAS, the District salutes the infinite, dynamic, and illustrious history of African Americans and affirms that the world in which we live would not exist if not for the plenteous contributions that African Americans have made throughout history and continue to make today; and

WHEREAS, the theme of this year’s celebration is “African Americans and the Vote”. This theme was selected to honor the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) granting African American men the right to vote and the centennial anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) granting women the right to vote; and

WHEREAS, the District is honored to recognize Jesse White, Illinois Secretary of State; and

WHEREAS, Secretary of State White is Illinois’ 37th Secretary of State. He was first elected to office on November 3, 1998. He is the longest serving Illinois Secretary of State, and the first African American Illinois Secretary of State; and

WHEREAS, Illinois Secretary of State White was born in Alton, Illinois in 1934. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in 1957 from Alabama State College (now Alabama State University); and

WHEREAS, he served in the United States’ Army 101st Airborne Division as a paratrooper, in addition to serving in the Army Reserves and in the Illinois National Guard. Illinois Secretary of State White also played baseball with the Chicago Cubs organization for numerous years and was employed as an educator and administrator in the Chicago Public School system for 33 years; and

WHEREAS, in 1959, Secretary of State White founded the internationally recognized Jesse White Tumblers (Tumblers) to provide an outlet for children from low income families. Focusing on modeling its members into successful and productive members of society, it is a requirement that the Tumblers do not consume drugs or alcohol, that they do not participate in gang activity, and that they maintain a minimum C average in school. Throughout the years, the Tumblers have performed in Belize, Bermuda, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Israel, Tokyo, and Zagreb; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served for 16 years. During his tenure, he was the Chairman on the Illinois House Committee on Human Services and was an energetic member of the education committee; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, Secretary of State White was elected as the Recorder of Deeds for Cook County, the nation’s second largest Recorder’s Office, a post to which he was re-elected in 1996; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, on behalf of ourselves and staff, do hereby recognize the month of February as Black History Month and honor Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White as a trailblazer; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be spread upon the permanent Record of Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and that a copy of same, suitably engrossed, be presented to Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White.

Dated: February 6, 2020