



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 20, 2020

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring Kathryn Harris

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 Kathryn Harris; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Harris was born on December 5, 1947 in Carbondale, Illinois. She attended Southern Illinois University where she studied French and Education; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Harris’ career as a librarian spanned over 40 years. While working as a librarian, she worked in six different libraries in southern Illinois and one in Florida. In her last role, Ms. Harris was employed as the Director of Library Services at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. She retired in March of 2015; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Harris served as Vice President of the Abraham Lincoln Association and as its first African American female President. She was also on the advisory board for the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum, was the President of the Illinois Library Association, and is currently on the board of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum; and

WHEREAS, since her retirement, Ms. Harris has been traveling and performing shows as a first-person historical presenter in which she portrays various historical figures, including Harriet Tubman, Elizabeth Keckley, Jarena Lee, and Sadie Delany; 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 Kathryn Harris as a historian and orator of Black history; 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 Kathryn Harris.

Dated: February 20, 2020