



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 3, 2022

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as African American History Month

WHEREAS, the concept of creating African American History Month (also known as Black History Month) can be traced back to the year 1915, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson traveled to Illinois to participate in the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which legally ended slavery in the United States. Dr. Woodson was among many that participated as an exhibitor during the three-week celebration; and

WHEREAS, witnessing the interest, curiosity, and demand for knowledge, Dr. Woodson decided to form an organization whose purpose would be to encourage the study of African American history and life, including the innumerable contributions of African American people to civilization. Thus, on September 9, 1915, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) was founded in Chicago; and

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

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

WHEREAS, in the 1940's, there were several occasions where the observance of Negro History Week slowly began to expand into a month-long commemoration. Then 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 began celebrating African American History Month; and

WHEREAS, President Gerald R. Ford became the first president to acknowledge Black History Week on

February 3, 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" that "have too long been obscured and unsung"; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Black History Week was officially changed to Black History Month. On February 10, 1976, in recognition of this milestone, President Ford issued the first "Message on the Observance of Black History Month". Since 1976, every President has officially designated February as African American History Month; and

WHEREAS, on February 11, 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month". While there have been some years in which Presidential Proclamations were not issued, since 1996 Presidential Proclamations have become a standard tradition; and

WHEREAS, the transformation from a weeklong observance to a month-long celebration was a major accomplishment for the ASNLH (now Association for the Study of African American Life and History). The modification captured Dr. Woodson's long held belief that the history, accomplishments, and achievements of African Americans were too meaningful to be crowded into a one-week event; and

WHEREAS, the theme of this year's national celebration of African American History Month is "Black Health and Wellness". This theme pays homage to the multitudinous contributions of African American practitioners and health care workers, including doctors, nurses, medical researchers, midwives, herbalists, doulas, and traditional healers; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (District) salutes the infinite, dynamic, and illustrious history of African Americans and honors the fact 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 District is proud of its annual celebration of African American History Month, which has been spearheaded for many years by Vice President Barbara McGowan. It was the Vice President's vision in 2018 to celebrate African American history for the entire month of February, making the District the first agency in the State of Illinois to do so. As the Vice President has chosen not to run for re-election to the Board of Commissioners, this will be her last African American History Month celebration at the District; 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 our staff, do hereby recognize the month of February as African American History Month; 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.

Dated: February 3, 2022