



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

100 East Erie Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Legislation Text

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 16, 2023

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring Shermann Thomas

WHEREAS, the concept of creating 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 Black 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 Black 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 greatly expanded. In many places, including college campuses, instead of celebrating Negro History Week, many students began celebrating Black 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 Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, on February 11, 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month". Presidential Proclamations have generally become a standard tradition since 1996; 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 celebration of Black History Month is "Environmental Justice and Advocating for Equity." This theme recognizes the necessity of fair treatment and meaningful involvement of communities of color with respect to the development and enforcement of environmental regulations. The push for environmental equity and justice began in the United States in the 1980s and was heavily influenced by the African American civil rights movement and continues today in seeking equal protection from environmental hazards and opportunity for input on decision-making; 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 Black History Month, making the District the first agency in the State of Illinois to do so. This year's celebration commenced on February 1, with the raising of the Pan-African flag at the Barbara J. McGowan Main Office Building and at every District plant; and

WHEREAS, Shermann Thomas, also known as the Chicago Urban Historian, has become hugely popular on multiple social media platforms for his creation of sixty second videos that share Chicago's unique history. Born and raised in Chicago, Mr. Thomas began chronicling small bits of Chicago history online in 2016; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the impact that representation has on perception, in 2022, Mr. Thomas co-founded Chicago Mahogany Tours (CMF). Dedicated to focusing on the history, landscape, and culture of Chicago, CMF seeks to educate visitors and native residents alike on the untold stories that make Chicago what it is; and

WHEREAS, through his narration of historic Chicago events and figures, Mr. Thomas seeks to impart that Chicago is more than the collection of negative stories that appear in the news. Chicago is a vibrant and thriving city full of mystery and worthy of admiration; 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 Black History Month and honor Shermann Thomas; 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 Shermann Thomas.

Dated: February 16, 2023