



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: 20-0131 **Version:** 1
Type: Resolution **Status:** Adopted
File created: 1/30/2020 **In control:** Miscellaneous & New Business
On agenda: 2/6/2020 **Final action:** 2/6/2020
Title: RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring Mary West

Sponsors:

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments:

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
2/6/2020	1	Board of Commissioners	Adopted	Pass

RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 6, 2020

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring Mary West

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 Mary West, the District’s first African American Director of Finance/Clerk of District; and

WHEREAS, Ms. West was hired at the District on December 17, 1959 as Secretary to Trustee Christopher Wimbish. On February 1, 1963, she was promoted to Principal Stenographer in the Engineering Design and Flood Control Section. She was later promoted to Secretary to Officer of the Engineering Department on March 15, 1969. While serving in this capacity, Ms. West began pursuing her Bachelor of Science degree in Administration and Management. In 1973, Hugh McMillan recognized Ms. West as invaluable and characterized her as one of the District’s most valuable employees. In 1974, she was chosen as a Superior Public Service Award recipient in the “Outstanding Clerical Employee” category. In 1984, Ms. West received her Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce from DePaul University. Due to her strong work ethic and recognition as an outstanding employee, she was again promoted on September 23, 1987 to Assistant Purchasing Agent and later appointed to Director of Finance/Clerk of the District on March 13, 1993. In 1994, Ms. West received her Master of Business Administration degree from Loyola University; and

WHEREAS, Ms. West retired from the District on June 27, 2003; 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 Mary West 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 Mary West.

Dated: February 6, 2020