



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 2, 2023

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

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”. 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 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 regulation. 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, the District will host a Black History Month program at the Barbara J. McGowan Main Office Building focusing on “Environmental Justice and Advocating for Equity.” Alden Loury, Data Projects Editor of WBEZ, will serve as the emcee, with panelists Cheryl Johnson, Executive Director of People for Community Recovery; Naomi Davis, Founder/CEO of Blacks in Green™; Greg Kelley, President of SEIU Healthcare; and Pastor Scott Onque’, Policy/Advocacy Director for Faith in Place. Karen Freeman-Wilson, President of the Chicago Urban League, will provide closing remarks; and

WHEREAS, Cheryl Johnson is the Executive Director of People for Community Recovery, whose mission is to enhance the quality of life of residents living in communities affected by pollution; and

WHEREAS, Naomi Davis is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Blacks in Green™, a community-based organization focused on the design and development of green, self-sustaining, mixed-income, walkable villages within Black neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Greg Kelley is the first African American President of SEIU Healthcare Illinois Indiana Missouri & Kansas, the fastest growing local union in the Midwest; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Onque’ is currently the Pastor of St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church, a 104-year-old historic church on the south side of Chicago, and he is also the Policy Director for Faith in Place, where he serves to promote environmental and social justice causes; 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

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 2, 2023