

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

22-54

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

March 7, 2017

To declare May 13, 2017, as “Remember the St. Louis Day” in the District of Columbia, a reminder of the tragedy that comes with refusing to welcome refugees and those seeking asylum from war and persecution.

WHEREAS, the United States was founded by immigrants, many fleeing religious persecution, who enshrined freedom of religion as one of our nation’s fundamental legal and ethical principles;

WHEREAS, on May 13, 1939, the German transatlantic liner MS St. Louis, carrying 937 passengers, almost all of them Jews fleeing from the Third Reich, sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba;

WHEREAS, the majority of the Jewish passengers of the MS St. Louis had applied for United States visas and received waiting numbers, and had planned to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States;

WHEREAS, when the MS St. Louis arrived in Havana harbor on May 27, the Cuban government admitted 28 passengers and refused to acknowledge them or to allow the remaining passengers to disembark from the ship;

WHEREAS, the State Department and the White House had decided not to take extraordinary measures to permit the refugees from the MS St. Louis to enter the United States, and a State Department telegram sent to the ship’s captain and passenger committee stated that the passengers must “await their turns on the waiting list and qualify for and obtain immigration visas before they may be admissible into the United States;”

WHEREAS, following the United States government’s refusal to permit the passengers to disembark, the MS St. Louis sailed back to Europe on June 6, 1939;

WHEREAS, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee negotiated with 4 European governments to secure entry for the passengers, and 532 MS St. Louis passengers were

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trapped when Germany conquered Western Europe, of which 278 survived the Holocaust and 254 died in the Holocaust;

WHEREAS, the Council recognizes this as a dark moment in our nation’s history and an incident from which we should learn a lesson about acceptance and inclusivity when considering our policy about persecuted peoples who seek a home in our nation;

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon the Council to pursue a policy agenda that is inclusive of refugees seeking asylum in our nation; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary to reaffirm the value of a pluralistic society, the beauty of a city composed of multiple cultures, and the acceptance of those seeking refuge from persecution.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Remember the St. Louis Day Recognition Resolution of 2017”.

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia declares May 13, 2017, as “Remember the St. Louis Day” in the District of Columbia, a reminder of the tragedy that comes with refusing to welcome refugees and those seeking asylum from war and persecution.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon the first date of publication in the District of Columbia Register.