

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

23-272

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

March 3, 2020

To recognize the 15th Anniversary of the first official District of Columbia Emancipation Day on April 16, 2020 as an important day in the history of the District of Columbia and the United States in that on April 16, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Compensated Emancipation Act which freed 3,100 slaves in the District of Columbia.

WHEREAS, on April 16, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the “District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act” during the Civil War;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act provided for immediate emancipation of 3,100 enslaved men, women, and children of African descent held in bondage in the District of Columbia;

WHEREAS, the Act authorized compensation of up to \$300 for each of the 3,100 enslaved men, women, and children held in bondage by those loyal to the Union, voluntary colonization of the formerly enslaved to colonies outside of America, and payments of up to \$100 to each formerly enslaved person who agreed to leave America;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act authorized the federal government to pay approximately one million dollars, in 1862 funds, for the freedom of 3,100 enslaved men, women, and children of African descent in the District of Columbia;

WHEREAS, the Act ended the bondage of 3,100 enslaved men, women, and children of African descent in the District of Columbia, and made them the "first freed" by the federal government during the Civil War;

WHEREAS, nine months after the signing of the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act, on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation

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of 1863, to begin to end institutionalized enslavement of people of African descent in Confederate states;

WHEREAS, on April 9, 1865, the Confederacy surrendered, marking the beginning of the end of the Civil War, and on August 20, 1866, President Andrew Johnson signed a Proclamation— Declaring that Peace, Order, Tranquility and Civil Authority Now Exists in and Throughout the Whole of the United States of America;

WHEREAS, in December 1865, the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified establishing that “ Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”;

WHEREAS, in April 1866, to commemorate the signing of the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, the formerly enslaved people and others, in festive attire with music and marching bands, started an annual tradition of parading down Pennsylvania Avenue, proclaiming and celebrating the anniversary of their freedom;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Parade was received by every sitting President of the United States from 1866 to 1901;

WHEREAS, on March 8, 2000 at the Twenty Seventh Legislative Session of the Council of the District of Columbia, Councilmember Vincent B. Orange, Sr. (D-Ward 5) authored and introduced, with Carol Schwartz (R-At large) the historic District of Columbia Emancipation Day Emergency Amendment Act of 2000, effective April 3, 2001, D.C. Law 13-237; D.C. 31 Official Code §§ 1-612.02a, 32-1201;

WHEREAS, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Emergency Amendment Act of 2000 was passed unanimously by the Council, and signed into law on March 23, 2000 by Mayor Anthony A. Williams to establish April 16th as a legal private holiday;

WHEREAS, on April 16, 2000, to properly preserve the historical and cultural significance of the District of Columbia Emancipation Day, Councilmember Orange hosted a celebration program in the historic 15th Street Presbyterian Church, founded in 1841 as the First Colored Presbyterian Church;

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WHEREAS, on April 16, 2002, after a one-hundred-year absence, the District of Columbia, spearheaded by Councilmember Orange with the support of Mayor Anthony Williams, returned the Emancipation Day Parade, to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW along with public activities on Freedom Plaza and evening fireworks (D.C. Official Code § 1 -182);

WHEREAS, on November 30, 2004, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Parade and Fund Act of 2004, effective March 16, 2005 (D.C. Law 15-240; D.C. Official Code § 1-181 5 et seq.), established the Emancipation Day Fund to receive and disburse monies for the Emancipation Day Parade and activities associated with the celebration and commemoration of the District of Columbia Emancipation Day;

WHEREAS, on January 4, 2005, the District of Columbia Emancipation Day Amendment Act of 2004, effective April 5, 2005 (D.C. Law 15-288; D.C. Official Code § 1-11 612.02(a)(11)), established April 16th as a legal public holiday;

WHEREAS, on April 16, 2005, District of Columbia Emancipation Day was observed for the first time as a legal public holiday, for the purpose of pay and leave of employees scheduled to work on that day (D.C. Official Code § 1-612.02(c)(2));

WHEREAS, the Council of the District of Columbia remembers and pays homage to the 23 million people of African descent enslaved for more than 2 centuries in America for their courage and determination;

WHEREAS, the Council of the District of Columbia remembers and pays homage to President Abraham Lincoln for his courage and determination to begin to end the inhumanity and injustice of institutionalized slavery by signing the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act on April 16, 1862; and

WHEREAS, on April 16, 2020, the District of Columbia will officially celebrate District of Columbia Emancipation Day for the 15th time.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “District of Columbia Emancipation Day Establishment 15th Anniversary Ceremonial Recognition Resolution of 2020”.

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Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia recognizes 15th Anniversary of the first, official District of Columbia Emancipation Day and the 158th Anniversary of District of Columbia Emancipation Day as an important, historic occasion for the District of Columbia and the nation and serves as an appropriate time to reflect on how far the District of Columbia and the United States have progressed since institutionalized enslavement of people of African descent; and, most importantly, the 158th Anniversary reminds us to reaffirm our commitment to forge a more just and united country that truly reflects the ideals of its founders and instills in its people a broad sense of duty to be responsible and conscientious stewards of freedom and democracy.

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