

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 216 Session of 2023

INTRODUCED BY SAPPEY, D. WILLIAMS, DONAHUE, HANBIDGE, KINSEY, HADDOCK, MADDEN, KHAN, FREEMAN, CEPEDA-FREYTIZ, SANCHEZ, MAYES, CONKLIN, SHUSTERMAN, BOROWSKI, M. MACKENZIE, SAMUELSON, RIGBY, GUENST, BOYD, OBERLANDER, HOWARD, DELLOSO AND FLEMING, SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

A RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing the month of September 2023 as "Transcontinental
2 Underground Railroad Month" in Pennsylvania.

3 WHEREAS, The trans-Atlantic slave trade began as early as the
4 15th century, introducing a system of slavery that was
5 commercialized, racialized and inherited; and

6 WHEREAS, People were forcefully abducted from Africa,
7 enslaved in the American colonies and exploited to work in the
8 production of crops, such as tobacco and cotton; and

9 WHEREAS, Although the Commonwealth passed a law in 1780 that
10 gradually eliminated slavery, the existing 6,000 enslaved people
11 in this Commonwealth remained enslaved and the enslaved people's
12 registered children would be enslaved until their 28th
13 birthdays; and

14 WHEREAS, Although a person could no longer legally import
15 enslaved people, they could buy and sell those who had been
16 registered after 1780; and

1 WHEREAS, The law freed few enslaved people immediately; and
2 WHEREAS, The Commonwealth continued to tolerate and profit
3 from the labor of enslaved people for decades and many
4 Commonwealth cities enacted legislation that restricted and
5 oppressed free people of color; and

6 WHEREAS, During the era of slavery in the United States, the
7 Underground Railroad covertly operated as a network of places,
8 routes and people that assisted African Americans who were
9 enslaved to escape to freedom; and

10 WHEREAS, The term Underground Railroad was used
11 metaphorically as "conductors," which included a racially
12 diverse group of abolitionists that transported and guided the
13 "passengers" traveling along the routes; and

14 WHEREAS, "Station masters" hid the freedom seekers at
15 "stations" which included homes, barns, churches and businesses;
16 and

17 WHEREAS, Freedom seekers who arrived at the safe houses were
18 referred to as "cargo"; and

19 WHEREAS, This Commonwealth was a strategic and historic
20 location of freedom through the Underground Railroad; and

21 WHEREAS, The Underground Railroad traced across this
22 Commonwealth in a clandestine network that helped African
23 Americans realize freedom in this Commonwealth and elsewhere;
24 and

25 WHEREAS, Organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery
26 Society, the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania, the
27 Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, the
28 Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Pennsylvania Society for
29 Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Pennsylvania Yearly
30 Meeting of Progressive Friends, Germantown Quaker Petition

1 Against Slavery and the Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia
2 worked tirelessly toward abolition within this Commonwealth; and

3 WHEREAS, Events and sites associated with the Underground
4 Railroad can be found in every county in this Commonwealth; and

5 WHEREAS, The Underground Railroad was integral in the freedom
6 and advancement of African Americans in the past, as well as
7 today; and

8 WHEREAS, The Commonwealth should show appreciation for the
9 inspiring efforts of the people of this Commonwealth and all of
10 those from around the world who have committed themselves to
11 document and share the Underground Railroad through the
12 Pennsylvania Civil War Sesquicentennial and Quest for Freedom
13 programs that connected Underground Railroad sites across this
14 Commonwealth, the National Park Service's National Underground
15 Railroad Network to Freedom program that lists 43 sites and
16 facilities in this Commonwealth and the United Nations
17 Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Sites of
18 Memory designations; and

19 WHEREAS, Commonwealth agencies, institutions and
20 organizations such as the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum
21 Commission, the Department of Community and Economic Development
22 and the 14 Frederick Douglass Institutes across the Pennsylvania
23 State System of Higher Education continue to educate young
24 people about the Commonwealth's role and leadership; and

25 WHEREAS, "Transcontinental Underground Railroad Month"
26 provides an opportunity for a worldwide open dialogue that
27 illuminates the hopes that arise from freedom for all people;
28 therefore be it

29 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives recognize the
30 month of September 2023 as "Transcontinental Underground

1 Railroad Month" in Pennsylvania; and be it further
2 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor all of
3 those who have fought and continue to fight for the freedom of
4 all people.