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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

J O I N T R E S O L U T I O N

CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE 1696 HISTORICAL COMMISSION" OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

Introduced By: Representatives Almeida, Williams, Diaz, Shekarchi, and Abney

Date Introduced: February 13, 2014

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

1 WHEREAS, Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its
2 Royal Charter in July 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter
3 guaranteeing that individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice
4 without any interference from the government; and

5 WHEREAS, This progressive act during the early settlement of the Colony of Rhode
6 Island would attract from across the world all manner of religious, ethnic and racial groups to
7 Rhode Island shores bringing with them their expertise in maritime trade and commerce; and

8 WHEREAS, By the 18th century Rhode Island was one of Colonial America's leading
9 maritime centers; and

10 WHEREAS, As Rhode Island became the first American Colony to declare its
11 independence from Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it was also at the same time in history one of
12 the largest African trade and importation centers; and

13 WHEREAS, The earliest history and people of Rhode Island has included persons of
14 African heritage who, even though they arrived as chattel property, would soon rise up to
15 establish many of America's earliest African American civic, religious, cultural and educational
16 enterprises; and

17 WHEREAS, The history of the African slave trade, the early arrival of persons of African
18 heritage to the state, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to
19 the development of this state and country is the proper concern of all people, particularly students

1 enrolled in the schools of the State of Rhode Island; now, therefore be it

2 RESOLVED, That a special legislative commission, to be known as "The 1696 Historical
3 Commission," so named in honor of the first documented group of enslaved Africans to arrive in
4 Rhode Island at Newport in 1696 on the brig Seaflower, be and the same is hereby created
5 consisting of fifteen (15) members: one of whom shall be the Secretary of State, or designee; one
6 of whom shall be the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or designee; one of
7 whom shall be the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage
8 Commission, or designee; and twelve (12) of whom shall be public members, four (4) of whom
9 shall be appointed by the President of the Senate, four (4) of whom shall be appointed by the
10 Speaker of the House, and four (4) of whom shall be appointed by the Governor.

11 The public members shall be residents of this state, chosen with due regard to broad
12 geographic representation and ethnic diversity, who have an interest in the history of Rhode
13 Island, the African slave trade and slavery in Rhode Island and America and the contributions of
14 African-Americans to our society. Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in the same
15 manner as the original appointment.

16 The purpose of said commission shall be to develop a comprehensive African American
17 history curriculum for all K-12 public schools in Rhode Island. Said curriculum should include,
18 but not be limited to, the history of persons of African heritage, including the history of African
19 peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to
20 America and Rhode Island, the enslavement experience in America and Rhode Island, abolition,
21 and the contributions of Africans to America and Rhode Island.

22 The commission shall develop, in consultation with the Department of Education,
23 curriculum guidelines for the teaching of information on the African slave trade, slavery in
24 America and Rhode Island, the vestiges of slavery in this country and state, and the contributions
25 of African-Americans to our country and state.

26 The commission shall make recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of the history
27 of persons of African heritage, including the history of African peoples before the political
28 conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America and Rhode Island, the
29 enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America, abolition, and the contributions of African
30 Americans to Rhode Island and America and any related special programs in the educational
31 system of the state, with the goal of funding and implementing such curriculum for the start of the
32 September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

33 Every local board of education is requested to incorporate the information developed by
34 the commission in an appropriate place in the curriculum of elementary and secondary school

1 students in the state; and

2 On facilitating the inclusion of the history of persons of African heritage, including the
3 history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the
4 passage to America and Rhode Island, the enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America,
5 abolition, and the contributions of African-Americans to Rhode Island and America and any
6 related special programs in the educational system of the state, with the goal of funding and
7 implementing such curriculum for the start of the September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

8 The Secretary of State, or designee, shall serve as the chair and the Commissioner of
9 Education, or designee, shall serve as the vice-chair of the commission. The presence of a
10 majority of the authorized membership of the commission shall be required for the conduct of
11 official business.

12 The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

13 The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission and Rhode Island
14 Department of Education shall provide staff support for the Commission.

15 All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information,
16 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or
17 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

18 The commission is authorized to prepare all reports by January 1, 2015 for the Governor
19 and the Legislature regarding its findings and recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of
20 the history of persons of African heritage, including the history of African peoples before the
21 political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America and Rhode
22 Island, the enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America, abolition, and the contributions
23 of African-Americans to Rhode Island and America and any related special programs in the
24 educational system of the State, with the goal of funding and implementing such curriculum for
25 the start of the September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

26 The Joint Committee on Legislative Services is hereby authorized and directed to provide
27 suitable quarters for said commission; and be it further

28 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the
29 General Assembly and the Governor no later than January 6, 2015, and said commission shall
30 expire on February 15, 2015.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
JOINT RESOLUTION
CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE 1696
HISTORICAL COMMISSION" OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

1 This resolution would create a fifteen (15) member special legislative study commission
2 whose purpose it would be to develop curriculum guidelines for the teaching of information on
3 the African slave trade, slavery in America and Rhode Island, the vestiges of slavery in this
4 country and state, and the contributions of African-Americans to our country and state, and who
5 would report back to the General Assembly and the Governor no later than January 6, 2015, and
6 whose life would expire on February 15, 2015.

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