

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 260365)

RESOLUTION

Recognizing and honoring May 21st of each year as “Ona Judge Day” in the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Ona Judge was one of nine enslaved African descendants held in bondage by George Washington during his presidency from 1790-1797 at the President’s House located at 6th and Market Streets in Philadelphia, the site of America’s first “White House”; and

WHEREAS, Despite Pennsylvania’s 1780 Gradual Abolition Act along with its 1788 amendment and the status of Philadelphia as the City with the largest free Black population in the nation at the time, Ona Judge and others were unlawfully kept enslaved through deliberate efforts to circumvent and actually break the law; and

WHEREAS, On May 21, 1796, Ona Judge courageously escaped from bondage, resisting the institution of slavery and asserting her right to freedom, ultimately fleeing to New Hampshire where, as a free woman, she outlived George and Martha Washington by more than 50 years; and

WHEREAS, Ona Judge’s life represents a powerful act of resistance, self-determination, and courage, as she evaded repeated efforts to be recaptured and refused to return to enslavement despite pressure and pursuit; and

WHEREAS, Her story is a critical part of both Philadelphia’s and the nation’s history, illustrating the contradictions between the ideals of liberty and the realities of slavery in the founding of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Ona Judge was one of nine enslaved African descendants held at the President’s House, and while this Resolution recognizes her specifically, it does not diminish the lives, struggles, and humanity of the eight others who were also held in bondage, including Hercules, who similarly escaped from George Washington’s household; and

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WHEREAS, The Avenging The Ancestors Coalition (ATAC), founded in June 2002 by Michael Coard, Esquire, has led sustained advocacy to ensure the truth about slavery at the President's House is told, preserved, and publicly recognized; and

WHEREAS, On May 21, 2003, and every year since, ATAC has organized commemorations honoring Ona Judge's escape, ensuring that her legacy and the broader history of enslaved African descendants in Philadelphia are remembered and uplifted; and

WHEREAS, Formally recognizing May 21st as "Ona Judge Day" will institutionalize this history within the City of Philadelphia, ensuring continued public education, reflection, and recognition of the struggle for freedom and justice; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby recognizes and honors May 21st of each year as "Ona Judge Day" in the City of Philadelphia and encourages residents, educators, institutions, and community organizations to commemorate this day through education, reflection, and programming that uplifts the history and legacy of Ona Judge and all those who resisted enslavement.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to the Avenging The Ancestors Coalition (ATAC) as evidence of the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the sixteenth day of April, 2026.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Bass

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Bass, Phillips, Gilmore Richardson, Jones, Landau, Lozada, Brooks, Harrity, Driscoll, Squilla and Ahmad