



# City of Philadelphia

City Council  
Chief Clerk's Office  
402 City Hall  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

## Legislation Text

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In recognition of Black History Month, remembering the “Pullman Porters”, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and A. Philip Randolph as the leaders of the nation’s first predominantly African-American labor union.

WHEREAS, In 1867, Chicago industrialist George Pullman revolutionized rail travel with his famous Pullman Cars. When a Pullman Car was leased to a railroad it came staffed with highly-trained porters, the vast majority of whom were recently freed slaves. Soon after, The Pullman Rail Car Company was the largest employer of blacks in the country, with the greatest concentration of Pullman Porters living on Chicago's South Side; and

WHEREAS, Despite the perception in their home neighborhoods that employment as a “Pullman Porter” was prestigious due to its steady income, an opportunity to travel across America and a life largely free of heavy physical labor. The porters were also mistreated, underpaid, overworked and subjected to countless indignities on the job; and

WHEREAS, The Pullman Rail Car Company knowingly paid their porters unlivable wages for full time work, on average equating to an annual salary of \$7,500 in today’s economy. The company also exploited their size and influence to enforce punitive work rules, such as only paying for half the hours worked in a day and consecutive 20 hour shifts without breaks or family leave. To add insult to injury, porters relied on tips from white passengers who often referred to all porters as "George", the first name of George Pullman, the company's white industrialist founder; and

WHEREAS, The company often pitted one race against another, threatening the predominately African-American Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters with an abundance of strike breakers of a different race ready to take their jobs if they continued to protest working conditions; and

WHEREAS, In spite of oppressive union breaking tactics on the part of the Pullman Rail Car Company, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were formed in Harlem in 1925 and were soon galvanized by the election of A. Philip Randolph, future organizer of the March on Washington Movement, as their president. After setbacks caused by depressed membership during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s amendments to the Railway Labor Act empowered the BSCP to successfully obtain their first collective bargaining agreement with the Pullman Company in 1937. This agreement included \$2 million in pay increases, a shorter workweek, and overtime pay; and

WHEREAS, Leaders of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters went on to play a significant role in the U.S. civil rights movement, achieved major federal non-discrimination protections and even organized the 1963 March on Washington; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby recognize and honor the role the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters played in advancing workplace protections and equal treatment for minorities in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the A. Philip Randolph

Pullman Porter Museum as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.