Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title:	Also naming Sixth Street, between Race Street and Lombard Street, as "Avenue to Freedom".				
Sponsors:	Councilmember Squilla, Councilmember Parker				
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
12/13/2018	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		
12/6/2018	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed On Next Week's Final Passage Calendar	Pass	

Also naming Sixth Street, between Race Street and Lombard Street, as “Avenue to Freedom”.

WHEREAS, Sixth Street in Philadelphia, from Race to Lombard Streets, is unmatched in American history for its celebration of African-American heroes and leaders, as they faced fierce opposition, rejected the shackles of slavery and encouraged the people to wrest control of their own fate. These blocks on Sixth Street mark some of the greatest triumphs in their struggle for freedom, as well as heinous events in that dark saga. It is time to properly recognize this street along which these courageous African-American men and women blazed the trail for freedom; and

WHEREAS, At Sixth and Market Streets stood the President’s House where President George Washington and First Lady Martha Washington employed nine household slaves, including Oney “Ona” Judge, the First Lady’s young seamstress and the proud master chef Hercules. Skirting Pennsylvania’s anti-slavery law, Martha Washington took her personal slave Ona to Trenton to renew her status as a slave. In 1796 a very determined Ona, semi-literate and cut off from her family took matters into her own hands and defied the most powerful man in America managing to escape from that house and find freedom in New Hampshire. A year later Hercules saw his years of faithful service and his culinary triumphs in Philadelphia at the President’s House “rewarded” back in Virginia by his being reduced to a field hand. Insulted at such disrespect, Hercules eventually disappeared from Mt. Vernon; and

WHEREAS, One of the most regressive legislative acts of the new American Congress took place in Congress Hall at Sixth and Chestnut Streets, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. This heinous measure placed additional obstacles in the way of anyone who might assist slaves in search of freedom; and

WHEREAS, The Liberty Bell, now housed along Sixth Street, had functioned as the Great State House Bell to keep time and mark emergencies. It was an African-American writer visiting the bell in the 19th Century who published a poem celebrating the biblical passage emblazoned on it: “Proclaim Liberty throughout the Land, to all the Inhabitants ….” From that time on, the Liberty Bell was the featured symbol in the national drive for abolition; and

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WHEREAS, A century before the block on Sixth Street near Independence Hall was officially named Washington Square, this plot of land was perhaps the only place in the colonies where slaves, snatched from their homes in Africa, could congregate to celebrate their heritage. On Sunday mornings, they gathered to enjoy their own music, food and customs all within ear shot of Independence Hall; and

WHEREAS, After enduring decades of a segregated section for African-Americans buried anonymously in that square, James O. Dexter and five other men filed the African Graveyard Petition which is considered perhaps the first attempt to achieve some public respect for their dead. The petition was rejected; and

WHEREAS, No place in 18th century America can boast more towering African American leaders such as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, friends and colleagues who together founded one of America's first mutual aid organizations, the Free African Society, to aid orphans, the unemployed and widows. They also led America's first equal rights "walkout" - from St. George's Methodist Church, to protest the congregation's segregationist policies. By 1807, Rev. Absalom Jones, founder of St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, was making his home at Sixth and Delancey Streets; and

WHEREAS, Richard Allen established and served as the Pastor of Mother Bethel and Bishop of all A.M.E. churches, now 7,000 congregations strong, in 26 countries. Reputedly on the oldest plot of ground owned by Blacks in America, it anchors Sixth and Lombard Streets. Bethel was an important site on the Underground Railroad. A block north of Mother Bethel, Allen provided a double house on Pine for his two daughters, eventually an active stop of the Underground Railroad. Sixth Street has undergone many changes in the past three centuries, Mother Bethel Church remains a proud and imposing religious fortress at Sixth and Lombard Streets. With its gleaming statue of Richard Allen on the corner, it reminds the world both of America's most shameful past and of its most courageous and determined leaders; and

WHEREAS, Today Sixth Street boasts the National Constitution Center with its celebration of the amendments which addressed the racism embedded in the original document, as well as the Judge Green Federal Building where the renowned civil rights champion Judge Leon Higginbottom once presided; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Sixth Street between Race Street and Lombard Street shall henceforth also be known as the "Avenue to Freedom".

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of the resolution be presented to The Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides, further evidencing the sincere support and admiration of this legislative body.

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