

## Legislation Text

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Honoring the memory of Octavius V. Catto and commending the establishment of the O.V. Catto Memorial Fund.

WHEREAS, Octavius V. Catto, born in 1840 in Philadelphia, was one of our City's most courageous and convincing civil rights leaders of all time; and

WHEREAS, Catto was noted for his scholarship and teaching at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia (the forerunner of Cheyney University), and was the founder of such prominent institutions as the Banneker Literary Institute, the Equal Rights League and the Pythian Baseball Club, the finest baseball team of its time in the City; and

WHEREAS, Catto was a member of numerous civic, literary, and political groups including the Franklin Institute, the Philadelphia Library Company, the 4th Ward Black Political Club and the Union League Association; and

WHEREAS, Catto was largely responsible for the adoption of the City's "Bill of Rights for Equal Access to Public Transportation," and was an ardent supporter of the Lincoln Administration, the efforts of the Republican Party to improve civil rights, and the struggle to end the scourge of slavery; and

WHEREAS, Catto was a Union Army Major during the Civil War and a leader in recruiting Black troops to fight for their emancipation, and with the assistance of the Union League, helped raise and train eleven regiments of "Colored Troops" from the area; and

WHEREAS, Shortly after Pennsylvania's adoption of the 15th Amendment in 1870 assured Black men the right to vote, Catto worked tirelessly to register Blacks and get them to the polls, despite street violence and murderous riots led by Irish immigrants who were supporters of the Democrats; and

WHEREAS, When Catto went to vote on October 10, 1871, a Democratic Party operative, Frank Kelly, fired two pistol shots into his back, killing him just steps from his home at 8th and South Streets; and

WHEREAS, Catto was given a full military funeral, attracting thousands of mourners of all races, the largest funeral the City had seen at that time and for a long time since; and

WHEREAS, Black historian W.E.B. DuBois cited Catto's death as a major factor in improving race relations in Philadelphia, but the assassination had a chilling effect for decades on Black political participation; and

WHEREAS, Despite citywide recognition of Catto's contributions at the time of his death, his gravesite was moved in the early 1900's to make way for a housing development, and his current gravesite may be unmarked, and while a former disciplinary school once held his name, there is no lasting memorial to his contributions; and

WHEREAS, The O.V. Catto Memorial Fund was recently established to erect a fitting memorial in Catto's honor somewhere in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, February is a month dedicated to recognizing the contributions of African-Americans past and present; now therefore

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we honor the memory of Octavius V. Catto and commend the establishment of the O.V. Catto Memorial Fund.