



Legislation Text

File #: 160350, **Version:** 0

Honoring and Recognizing Freedom Theatre on the Occasion of its 50th Anniversary.

WHEREAS, Freedom Theatre was founded in 1966 by John E. Allen, Jr. in order to introduce black youth to the theater, both as audience members and as students of the theater arts. It is now recognized as the oldest African American theatre in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Freedom Theatre's 299-seat John E. Allen, Jr. Theatre is housed by the Edwin Forrest Mansion on North Broad Street, an anchor on the Avenue of the Arts. The mansion's namesake was America's first internationally-recognized stage actor, and today the mansion is a National Historic Landmark; and

WHEREAS, Freedom Theatre's Performing Arts Training Program was founded by Robert E. Leslie in 1971. This program offered local youth the opportunity to learn the theater arts from distinguished teachers and role models, and it continues today; and

WHEREAS, The training program has blossomed to reach as many as 800 students annually. It has been highly acclaimed, as Denzel Washington once called it a "unique and exciting" program. Graduates include Gary Dourdan of television's CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Wanya Morris of the Grammy-winning, multi-platinum singing group Boyz II Men; and

WHEREAS, Nationally acclaimed director Walter Dallas was named Freedom's Artistic Director after the death of John E. Allen, Jr. in 1992 and continued to serve until 2008. In 1993 Dallas created Freedom Rep, the professional performing company of Freedom Theatre. This led to Freedom Theatre's rise to a nationally-recognized regional theater. It was the second African American theater to join the renowned League of Resident Theatres; and

WHEREAS, Alumni of Freedom Theatre have gone on to star at the highest levels of theater and the performing arts. Leslie Odom, Jr., a star of the Grammy Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway musical Hamilton, says, "there is a focus on excellence, and personal responsibility, and joy, and improvisation, and fearlessness, and pride, and intellect, and humility that I learned at the Freedom Theatre"; and

WHEREAS, Under the leadership of Executive Producing Director Sandra Norris Houghton, Freedom Theatre continues to provide training and inspiration to young thespians. Barrymore Award winner Patricia Scott Hobbs serves as the director of the Performing Arts Training Program. Freedom Theatre's performance calendar includes both original and traditional plays. The historic significance of Freedom Theatre gives its current productions extra meaning as they continue to represent the African American experience through the performing arts; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Council of the City of Philadelphia is pleased to honor and recognize Freedom Theatre on the occasion of its 50th Anniversary.

RESOLVED FURTHER, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Freedom Theatre,

evidencing the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.