

Legislation Text

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Designating September as International Underground Railroad Month in Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, September is being promoted as International Underground Railroad Month by the National Park Service in collaboration with states, counties, cities, and other organizations connected to the Underground Railroad; and

WHEREAS, The Underground Railroad, a clandestine effort to provide shelter and aid to escaped enslaved people from the South and to assist them in their pursuit of freedom, was established by a diverse network of abolitionists throughout the United States during the 19th century; and

WHEREAS, The Underground Railroad was a key effort that undermined the institution of slavery, providing a pathway to freedom for as many as 100,000 men, women, and children; and

WHEREAS, As the first state to abolish slavery, Pennsylvania played a crucial strategic role in aiding enslaved people in their pursuit of freedom via the Underground Railroad, providing many entry points to freedom; and

WHEREAS, Long known as a destination for freedom seekers, Philadelphia has a storied history connected to the Underground Railroad. The city was home to many abolitionists and anti-slavery activists, including Octavius V. Catto, Henrietta Duterte, James Forten, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Robert Purvis, Harriett and Stephen Smith, Letitia and William Still, and William Whipper. Philadelphia was also home to many anti-slavery and abolitionist organizations with connections to the Underground Railroad, including The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the first antislavery society in the nation, which was founded in 1775; and

WHEREAS, Mr. William Still deserves particular recognition for his efforts on the Underground Railroad and the larger abolition movement. He served as chairman of the Vigilance Committee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and was often referred to as the “Father of the Underground Railroad,” directly aiding over 800 fugitive slaves and maintaining records of the people served in order to help families reunite. This year marks the 200th Anniversary of Mr. Still’s birth; and

WHEREAS, Many sites in Philadelphia, including but not limited to Belmont Mansion, Fair Hill Cemetery, the Johnson House, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, and Independence National Historic Park are connected to the Underground Railroad, with many serving as havens for fleeing enslaved people; and

WHEREAS, The Council and the people of Philadelphia appreciate the inspiring efforts of our forebears in Philadelphia, and people around the world who, to this day, fight for the freedom of all people; and

WHEREAS, International Underground Railroad Month offers Philadelphians and people around the world an opportunity to honor those who pursued their freedom by traveling the Underground railroad, and express gratitude for those who aided them on their journey to emancipation, and serves as a reminder that the fight for true freedom for all people is still being fought; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby designate September as International Underground Railroad Month in Philadelphia.