



Legislation Text

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Also naming the 6300 block of Lancaster Avenue as Absalom Jones Way, to commemorate Reverend Absalom Jones and his legacy as an abolitionist, clergyman and the founder of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, the first African Episcopal Church in The United States.

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones was born enslaved on November 7, 1746, in Sussex, Delaware; and

WHEREAS, While living the early years of his life deprived of his freedom, Reverend Jones was moved to Philadelphia where he worked as a clerk in his enslaver's store. He learned how to read and write, and earned an education by attending an all Black night school; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones married Mary King and purchased her freedom from her enslaver. In 1784, he was granted his freedom and became a lay preacher at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, In 1786, Reverend Jones met Richard Allen and together they increased black membership at St. George's by tenfold. Unfortunately, the white members of the congregation were unhappy with the new members and attempted to segregate them in the balcony of the church. As a result, Jones and Allen led a walk-out and founded The Free African Society in 1787; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones spent his time with The Free African Society by leading the group in their social, political, and humanitarian goals. The organization was dedicated to assisting widows and orphans, as well as assisting with sick relief and burial expenses; and

WHEREAS, Membership in the Free African Society began to grow, and the members wished to affiliate themselves with the Episcopal Church. After parting ways with Richard Allen, Reverend Jones founded The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in 1792; and

WHEREAS, After the founding of St. Thomas, the church was accepted into the Episcopal Diocese. Not long after, Reverend Jones was ordained by Bishop William White as the first African American Episcopal Priest in 1802; and

WHEREAS, The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, under the leadership of Reverend Jones, was deeply involved in assisting the City of Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. The church was instrumental in assisting the sick in a variety of ways-- acting as nurses, taking care of the sick, burying the dead, and working as undertakers. After a racist pamphlet was circulated alleging that black individuals treating the sick were profiting from the disease, Reverend Jones and Richard Allen published an opposing article detailing their heroic actions to assist the sick and dying. Their work assisting those affected by epidemic was defended and commended by the then Mayor of Philadelphia, Matthew Clarkson; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones was an ardent abolitionist, dedicated to eradicating the practice of slavery. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793, Reverend Jones drafted multiple petitions criticizing the legislation as cruel and brutal. Unfortunately, both of those petitions were rejected by the U.S. House of

Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones passed away on February 13, 1818, at the age of 71 and his earthly remains are interred in the alter of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Reverend Jones has been listed on the Episcopal Calendar of Saints, memorialized on the date of his death; and

WHEREAS, The selfless dedication of the Reverend Absalom Jones to the religious community in Philadelphia, and his inspiring actions to abolish slavery should be forever remembered and memorialized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Absalom Jones' legacy in the City of Philadelphia be memorialized and that the 6300 block of Lancaster Avenue shall henceforth be known as "Absalom Jones Way."

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the congregation of The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, as evidence of the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.