



# City of Philadelphia

City Council  
Chief Clerk's Office  
402 City Hall  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

## Legislation Text

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Recognizing and celebrating the Washerwoman Strike of 1881, a Black women-led worker movement fighting for better wages, dignity, and labor protections, on the occasion of Black History Month.

WHEREAS, Laundry workers in Atlanta in 1881 were predominantly Black women - nearly all Black working women were household workers, and more Black women worked as laundry workers than any other type of domestic work. Black women were primarily responsible for supporting and building their communities. In Atlanta at that time about half of all Black wage earners were women; and

WHEREAS, Working long hours for little pay on a physically exhausting task, laundry workers carried gallons of water to and from wells, burned themselves manufacturing lye, and used heavy irons to dry clothes. Women began working as domestic workers between ages 10 to 16 and often worked past the age of 65, and were paid between \$4 to \$8 per month; and

WHEREAS, Twenty Black women organized the Washing Society in Atlanta in July of 1881 in order to demand better pay and went on strike demanding \$1.00 per dozen pounds of wash, along with respect and autonomy for their work. They knocked the doors of their neighbors and washer women across Atlanta to build their coalition. In three weeks, their coalition had grown from twenty to 3,000 women; and

WHEREAS, Atlanta municipal authorities sought to break the strike including by fining and even arresting members of the Washing Society. The Atlanta City Council eventually proposed a \$25 annual fee - several months of wages - for the washerwoman's organization, plus commercial licensing. Recognizing the importance of self-regulating their industry, the Washing Society accepted, and sprang a subsequent series of strikes by cooks, cleaners, nurses and other domestic workers; and

WHEREAS, The event marked one of the first major instances of union organizing in America, and came in the postwar South from a community still fresh from the horrors of enslavement. The bravery and indomitability of Black women exemplifies the strength and commitment that organizing requires, and shows that an organized people beat entrenched power; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Recognizes and celebrates the Washerwoman Strike of 1881, a Black women-led worker movement fighting for better wages, dignity, and labor protections, on the occasion of Black History Month.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That three Engrossed copies of this resolution be presented to the Philly Black Worker Project, the PA Chapter of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and El Comité de Trabajadorxs, as an expression of the gratitude and admiration of the Council of the City of Philadelphia.